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Vol. I

The Steam Man of the Plains.

Author of "Frank Reade and His Steam Horse," "The Boy Balloonist," Etc., Etc.



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address

THE STEAM MAN OF THE PLAINS;

OR,

THE TERROR OF THE WEST.

By HARRY ENTON,

Author of "Water Duck Jim," "Harry Franco," "The Boy Lion Tamers," "Tom, Dick and Harry," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

FRANK AND CHARLEY.

"FRANK!" shouted Mrs. Reade, from the rear of her dwelling. "Here's your Cousin Charley, from Missouri."

"All right," said a voice that seemed to come from a sort of woodshed at the end of a long yard, "I'm coming."

The door of the outhouse was cautiously opened, and Frank Reade slipped out, carefully reclosing the door.

In a moment he was shaking hands with the tall, broad-shouldered western youth who had traveled from Missouri to New York to pay him a visit.

In age the cousins were alike, both being sixteen, but while Frank, born and bred in New York, and being of a studious nature, and quite a thinker, was pale, slim, and not over strong, the Missouri boy, breathing the free air of the great prairies, had grown strong and robust in form, a splendid hunter, a dead shot, and a lover of wild adventure.

The Reade family were well to do in the world, and Frank, the only child, had been permitted to have his way until he was pretty well spoiled. However, his greatest delight was to indulge his inventive genius, and that had full play.

The moment that Mrs. Reade left the two boys alone, Frank grasped his cousin by the hand and said:

"If I show you something will you give me your word to keep your mouth shut about it?"

"Certainly," said Charley Gorse, wondering what was up.

"Then follow," said the mysterious Frank, and he led the way to the wood-house.

He cautiously opened the door a little, gave a glance at the windows of all the houses in the block, to see if anyone was looking, and then bolted into the building and drew Charley in after him.

"Thunderation!" cried Charley, for there in front of him he suddenly beheld a huge figure, looking like one of the giants of old.

The western boy was startled, and might have backed out of the door, had not Frank restrained him.

"Hold on," he said, laughing at his cousin's evident alarm; "you needn't be afraid; it's only a machine."

"Phew," whistled Charley.

"Fact!" triumphantly cried Frank. "It's one of the greatest inventions of the age. It's a steam man."

"And can it walk?" asked Charley.

"Walk? yes, and run, too," proudly replied Frank. "That's my invention, and nobody knows anything about it but you. If you can keep quiet over the thing you shall see whether it can walk."

"I'm too surprised to say anything," said Charley, and he walked up to the invention to examine it.

The contrivance stood in the center of the floor. Charley Gorse beheld a metallic imitation of a man. The figure was about twelve feet high from the bottom of the huge feet to the top of the plug hat which adorned the steam man's head. An enormous belly was required to accommodate the boiler and steam chest, and this corpulency agreed

well with the height of the metallic steam chap. To give full working room to the very delicate machinery in his interior, the giant was made to convey a sort of knapsack upon his shoulders. The machine held its arms in the position taken by a man when he is drawing a carriage.

There were numerous rods, doors, shafts and other contrivances which puzzled the western boy, and he turned inquiringly to Frank.

"I'll explain it to you," said the enthusiastic inventor. "Look at his face."

Charley glanced up at the face of the monster and beheld a huge pair of glass eyes and an enormous mouth.

"Now, then," said Frank, "the lamp will be in his head, and his eyes will be the headlights. His mouth holds the steam whistle. Here, in his belly, we open a door and put in fuel, and the ashes fall down into his legs and are emptied from the moveable knee-pan, and without injury to the oiled leg-shafts, for they are inclosed in a tube. That is why the fellow's limbs are so large. Those wire cords increase the power in one leg, and cause that leg to go much faster, and in that manner we get a side movement and can turn around."

"Go on," said Charley, who was intensely excited. "It's feet are spiked like a base-ball player's are spiked, to prevent the machine from slipping under speed," said Frank. "Then you notice that its legs are very long, and very far apart, so as to give it balance. This stop-cock on the side will let on or shut off steam."

"Crawlin' snakes!" muttered the Missouri boy. "And will you ride on that knapsack?"

"Oh, no," laughed Frank. "I am making a low, broad, and very heavy wagon for the contrivance, and it will be finished in a few days. The hands of the man will hold the shafts of the wagon. The vehicle will carry two or three persons and hold my fuel and water, sufficient for several days, and I have made a tent-like covering for the concern so that I could sleep in the wagon if I went on a journey. Here in the knapsack are my steam valves; the top of the hat is only a sieve, and the smoke will come out of that. Then there's drafts and stops-off without number. The steam gauge is there in the fellow's back."

"Thunder!" said Charley Gorse; "how fast can it go?"

"It can go fifty miles an hour," replied Frank.

"On a level road I should not hesitate to run at thirty or thirty-five an hour."

"With a wagon and people in it?"

"Yes," said Frank. "Steam is a wonderful power, you know."

Charley did not make any reply, he was thinking deeply.

"What's the matter?" asked Frank.

"Hold on," excitedly returned Charley. "I've got an idea for you. What are you going to do with your machine when you get it completed?"

"I really hadn't thought about it," said Frank.

"I'll tell you what to do," cried Charley, "come back to Clarksville with me, take the whole machine with you, I'll pay the bill, and then you and I'll go out on the plains hunting and roving, dashing around in style, and racing the reds half to death, for I am sure they don't know even what a steam engine is like. You see my dad

has got a big farm, raises stock and lots of produce, and sends it to St. Louis, and as there's lots of money coming in all the while, I have everything my own way. But the reds, Sioux, Injuns, bother me. Around the town they're peaceful enough, but if you get them out among the big game on the plains they'll raise a rumpus. I had to travel a hundred miles by boat to get to the steam cars, and I guess the reds that live beyond Clarksville don't know much about steam inventions. I tell you we can have a good time fun!"

The blood leaped to Frank's cheeks, and his cousin spoke, and an eager light danced in his eyes.

"Wouldn't it be splendid?" he said. "On a level plains would be just the thing for us, and in time of danger we could rush off with the speed of the wind."

He was greatly excited over the idea, and was doubtless as eager as most boys would be to see the great west—the novelist's great story.

"Will you do it?" asked Charley. "I've got enough money to see the whole thing put in style. Will you go?"

"I will!" hastily responded Frank.

"And do you think your folks will let you go?" asked Charley.

"Not to carry out your idea," said Frank. "My steam man is known only to us two. We must keep the secret from everybody, and manage to ship the affair off before we go. They will suppose that I am only going on an ordinary visit."

"That's the idea," said Charley Gorse. "I say, does the chap take apart?"

"Yes."

"And the wagon?"

"The entire concern can be taken apart and packed in a medium-sized case," said the inventor.

"Bully!" exclaimed Charley. "Then we'll send it away a week or two before we go, and when we get to Clarksville we can put it together and start out."

"Just so," said Frank; "and if we do get out on the plains, I'll make your eyes open with wonder. I've got about a dozen different inventions that will make the red-skins believe that they can run across the devil at last. I have made a pair of night pistols."

"Night pistols!" repeated Charley, wondering much at his companion's words; "what do you mean by night pistols?"

"Pistols that may be used in as dark a night as you have ever seen," said the young inventor. "And you can bring down your game with them as well as you could in broad daylight."

The western cousin regarded the inventor with genius with wonder and admiration.

"You're a smart little cuss," said he.

"I'll make the Sioux believe I am," said Frank. "Just give me a chance to use my little inventions among them, and if you don't see fun in wild adventures, then call me a fool. I'll scare an Indian out of his wits."

"You'll have a chance," said Charley; and the voice of Frank's mother called them into the house, the steam man being very securely locked in by his inventor.

For the next two weeks the two boys were very mysterious, and the old people were wondering what was up.

They thought the mystery explained when Frank asked that he might go with his cousin to Missouri, and they freely gave their consent.

The boys were wild with delight. They flitted from the house to the place where the steam man now stood, in the full glory of a coat of paint, and proceeded to execute their plans.

A strong case was procured, the huge traveler carefully taken apart, and packed away with the pieces of the wagon, and then the whole concern was strongly bound and nailed.

Frank made an engagement with a man who owned a truck, managed to send his mother out for an hour, and thus made his shipment in secrecy, and the man of metal was started on his journey.

Now that the invention had gone, the young inventor longed to follow, and he chafed until the time arrived.

Then, well supplied with money, and carrying wonderful contrivances in his trunk, the genius and his cousin bade good-bye to the city, and were whirled away towards the setting sun.

Both were plucky, both were fond of excitement, yet still they might have turned back in alarm if they could have peered into the future and learned what terrible dangers, what wild, blood-curdling scenes they were destined to meet in the troublous west.

CHAPTER II.

THE STEAM MAN TO THE RESCUE.

"HELP!"

The thrilling cry for aid rang out over a wild scene.

An almost trackless western prairie was on fire!

The red flames leaped and danced over the tall, dry grass, carried forward by the whistling breeze.

Over the prairies, dashing along at terrific speed in advance of the shrieking flames came the steam man of the plains, his long, iron limbs making gigantic strides to escape the fearful enemy in the rear, the heavy wagon containing the two young adventurers fairly leaping from the ground under the effect of the high rate of speed.

On the driver's seat sat Frank Reade, holding the reins with a firm grasp and guiding the steam man as one guides a horse.

In the rear box in the rear part of the wagon sat Charley Gorse.

A cry of appeal arose high and clear above the roaring of the flames.

This time it reached Charley's ears, and he gazed in the direction from which the cry came.

He beheld a sight that brought him to his feet with a bound.

At the rear, and slightly to one side of the track they had passed over, he beheld a white man in the grasp of a brawny red-skin.

The white man was on his knees; the Indian stood over him with uplifted tomahawk.

A moment's delay would be fatal.

"Halt!"

The command pealed from Charley's lips as his rifle flew to his shoulder.

Frank pulled a rod and shut off the steam.

The steam man shivered and then stood still.

"Crack!"

The rifle pealed forth its shrill note, and almost at the same instant of time the red-skin fell lifeless to the ground, shot through the body by the unerring aim of the Missouri marksman.

Then Frank looked around, and found that Charley had saved a human life.

The man he had rescued from death had got upon his feet, and was now rushing swiftly towards them.

He was making good headway, for he was running for his life.

The flames were close behind him.

Already he could feel their scorching breath on his neck.

"Be quick, for your life!" cried Frank.

The man's feet seemed to fairly tremble as he rushed forward.

The driver of the strange concern placed his hand on the connecting rod, ready to turn on a good head of steam the moment that the fugitive was safely in the wagon.

The breeze was light, or the man could not have escaped the fire, and as it was, the wind seemed to increase as it moved along in the wake of the flying man.

"Make a spurt!" shrieked Charley, casting his rifle aside, and leaning over the back of the wag-

on in order to assist the man when he came up within reach. "Make a spurt and you're saved."

Urged on to make every endeavor by these cries, the man dashed forward like some frightened animal.

The flames shrieked loudly and seemed to gain upon him.

Yes, see, they have crawled up to the man's very feet, and even now their long red tongues shoot upward and forward as if to lap his shrinking body.

He reaches the wagon, stumbles; Charley seizes his hand and pulls him quickly into the vehicle, and with a shrill snort the steam man dashes swiftly away o'er the plains, speedily leaving the hissing flames far behind.

As soon as the man was hauled into the body of the wagon he gave utterance to a deep sigh, and then tumbled unconscious and almost exhausted into the bottom of the vehicle.

"Let him alone," said Frank. "He's wind-broken, and as soon as he gets back his natural breathing he'll be all O. K. Just raise his head a little, so as to give his chest full play."

Charley did so.

The steam man rushed on.

The wind whistled a lively tune in the ears of the rescued man, and his chest swelled out.

In a moment after he drew a deep breath, and then he sat up on his elbow and leaned against the wood-box.

He gazed wonderingly up at Frank and Charley, and the very first words that he said were:

"Have yez any whisky?"

The question seemed so comical under the circumstances, that both the New York boy and the more rough and ready cousin laughed outright.

"We have," said Charley.

"Thin, for the love o' God, do yez pass me a dhrop o' the crater, for it's dead and kilt intirely I am wid thim bastely redskins and the devil's own fire, and me runnin' loike Tam O'Shanter wid the witches behint him. Musha—musha, but the flames licked me feet."

Charley handed him the flask of whisky he carried, and the Irishman tipped it high in the air.

"Ah, that puts new life in me veins," he said.

"Then tell me how you got into such a nice little scrape," said Charley. "First tell me your name."

"Barney Shea, o' the town o' Clonakilty, in the County of Cork," replied the other.

"And what got you into this scrape that came so very near—"

Charley had spoken thus far when Barney leaped to his feet and placed his hands upon Frank's shoulders.

"Sthop the caar—sthop the caar!" he shouted in the driver's ears. "I'm going the other way, and how'll I—oh, murther—murther, tare an' ous, what the devil's that?"

The sudden change in his sentence was caused by the fact that he had caught sight of the steam man, and was struck with wonder; almost fear.

Enjoying his wonder greatly, the young driver pulled a certain cord, and forth from the giant's mouth came a huge jet of steam, accompanied by a loud, shrieking whistle that seemed to convey the idea that the steam man was suffering with a stomach ache.

"Och, worra—worra, will I ever go home!" groaned Barney Shea, and fell down in a heap on the floor of the wagon, while the loud laughter of the two boys pealed out merrily on the air.

Frank shut off steam, and the big traveler soon stood still.

Many miles away to the east they could see the black clouds rolling over the burning prairies, but they were safe from the tongues of flame.

When the concern came to a halt, Barney tumbled out over the back of the wagon, and would have made off at the top of his speed, had not the laughing boys restrained him.

"Aff wid ye; let me go," cried Barney Shea, struggling with the merry boys. "I'll not be affther ridin' in the devil's coach. Musha my gad, will I ever go home?"

"Cork up," chuckled Frank, who greatly enjoyed Barney's consternation. "Are you afraid of my man?"

"What's that you call him?" asked Barney.

"My man—my steam man."

"And it's only a contrivance?" asked the Irishman, timidly, peeping up at the tall traveler.

"That's all," said Frank.

Barney threw up his hands in wonder, and then began to inspect the machine.

The boys then inspected him.

They saw a tall, heavily molded figure, a shock of fiery red hair, a pair of bright, twinkling blue eyes, and a nose as fiery-red as the hair; in short, a fair sample of a jolly, handy, good-natured Irishman of middle age, and evidently one who lived on whisky and fighting, and thrived on it, too.

Suddenly he turned away from inspecting the steam man, and addressed the boys.

"I'm losing me head entirely," he said. "I'm standin' here whin I should be going to Fort Tremont."

"What's that for?" asked Charley.

"Help," replied Barney.

"Who is in danger?"

"An immigrant thrain," replied Barney. "They are just beyant the Shallow Stream, where they're holdin' back a band of murtherin' and scalping wretches. I took just a wee bit too much of the crathur on the road, and what did I do but dhrop dead aslake in the tall grass. Whin I waked up shure the grass was on fire, and fornist me stood a red haythen. I tried to arise, but the spalpeen laped upon me shoulders and forced me down onto me marrow bones. Jist thin I heard yez smashin' along and I hollered for help. Yez know the rest, and ye can know by that same token that Barney Shea'll die for aither of yez."

"That's all right," said Charley. "What is this band that threatens the train?"

"White and red," replied Barney.

"Injuns and white robbers!" exclaimed the boy. "I wonder what gang it is! Have you any guide with the wagons?"

"We have Snap Carter," replied Barney.

"Good!" said Charley. "Snap's a hull horse and a team to let. Did he mention who the enemies were under?"

"Yis, he did that. He said 'twas Captain Sam Slasher."

"The biggest cut-throat in Missouri," cried the western boy. "I know the whole gang. The Sioux with him are under three chiefs—old Sholum Alarkum, that bloodthirsty Mutseer, and the treacherous Tolahpesser."

He then turned to Frank and said:

"These people require our aid."

"Then let's go to them," said Frank.

"Do you hold yourself ready to clean out the hull gang?" asked Charley.

"I do," said Frank. "What do they number?"

"About a hundred in all."

"And how many men has the train?" asked the boy of Barney.

"Three min to aich wagon, and I belave its twelve carts they have," was the reply.

"Thirty-six on our side and a hundred on the other," said Charley.

"We'll count ourselves about sixty," said the driver of the steam man. "Jump in and let's be off to the rescue!"

They all clambered in, and Charley seated himself by the driver to point out the way.

The steam was let on, the man verged around to the proper direction, and then they set off across the plains, the long iron legs of the big prairie traveler shooting in and out with rapid motion.

"Is it on the old trail?" asked Charley of the Irishman.

"It is," said Barney.

Not another word was uttered for some time, and the steam man dashed quietly along over the smooth plains, the heavy wagon rolling along as smoothly as on a plank road.

Mile after mile flew by, and then they began to discern a small patch of wood that stood by the side of a very shallow brook.

In this patch of wood, not larger than an ordinary grove, were the wagons, cattle, and people of the besieged train.

In all probability the robbers of the plains were concealed in the tall, rank grass of the brookside.

Frank shut off steam and leaped down from the seat, and then threw back the lid of a large trunk in the body of the wagon.

"That's the ticket!" cried Charley. "Fix the old chap up in style, and he'll walk right straight through to victory!"

CHAPTER III.

THE BLAZING GIANT.

THE sun was setting.

All day long the faithful guardians of the train had stood watch by the sides of the besieged wagons, and for some hours Snap Carter had looked anxiously out in the direction of the fort, murmuring:

"The fort's not eleven miles away; why in the name o' thunder don't they come?"

Every now and then a mounted steed would rise up into view from the tall grass, and dash swiftly away with its rider.

Snap Carter knew that a desperate band of cut-throats—white men and red—lay in the weeds only waiting for night to come. Then they would swarm upon the little band of emigrants in the darkness, shoot, stab and kill, capture, burn, plunder and destroy, and then away to their wild lair.

The night came slowly down upon the wagon train.

Carter doubled the guards, prepared each man for the worst, now that all the women and children were inside the wagons, and then stole some distance away in advance of the train, wishing to be the advance sentinel of the people who looked up to him for safety.

The old guide crawled out several feet from the wagons, and then his eyes caught sight of an object moving through the grass ahead of him.

Carter rested on his side, drew a keen knife from his belt, and awaited the appearance of the object.

Nearer and nearer it came, and at last he heard the sound of deep breathing.

"An Injun crawlin' on the train," decided the guide, and he grasped his rifle with a determined grip. "His career'll wind up right here."

The grass was parted, and the tufted head of an Indian warrior became dimly discernible to the guide.

With a convulsive movement, an immense twitch of the whole body, Carter flung himself upon the red-skin.

As he landed upon the bowed form of the Sioux, the latter gave utterance to a loud yell.

"That's your last yawp," gritted Carter, and his sinewy hand clutched the red-skin's wind-pipe, effectually shutting off his breath. "I'd kill you only for yelling, yer copper-colored murderer o' women!"

The guide's right arm was flung up, and then descended with speed and strength, and a sickening thud told that the blade had sunk into the Indian's body.

At that instant a peculiar yell rang out far ahead.

Old Carter listened intently.

The cry was answered from far away toward the left.

Carter got upon his feet.

The peculiar yell now sounded some distance off to the right.

"Surrounded!" cried the guide, and with fleet steps he dashed back to the corral of wagons, flinging the sentinels the pass-word as he darted past them.

"Out with every light in the camp!" cried the guide. "We're surrounded by the cussed rascals. They're on all sides of us, and we mustn't show them a spark. If this black night will hold out we may be able to keep them puzzled. Show them so much as the light of a pipe and yer lost!"

"But they can't come on us from all sides, I should say," spoke up one of the men. "I think they'll come over the plains in front."

"So they will," said Old Carter. "I'll creep out that way, and warn yer when I hear 'em comin'. They've been waitin' for darkness, but not such black night as this. Keep yer eyes well opened."

The old guide tightened his belt and dropped to the ground.

At that moment a low sound was heard, and the next instant the thrilling cry rang out:

"The reds are upon us!"

Old Carter leaped back against the wall of wagons.

Dim forms could now to be seen advancing toward the barricade.

"Fire at anything yer peepers rest on," cried the guide, and as he spoke there came a startling interruption.

A terrible shriek rang out.

The sound was like a hoarse whistle.

Again that loud, piercing sound came to their ears.

Then they heard the noise of heavy feet rushing swiftly toward them over the plains.

A powerful light suddenly flashed over the prairies, revealing a large body of men standing and crouching in the grass.

"Fire!"

The command pealed loudly from the lips of the old guide.

Crash!

The guns of the emigrants sent forth their death-dealing storm.

The leaden hail had swept through the ranks of the motionless enemy, carrying destruction and death in its track as the bullets found a mark.

Then followed a thrilling sight.

As the cries and shrieks of the wounded and dying pealed forth upon the air, that loud, whistling sound again rang out, and forth from the darkness rushed a gigantic form with eyes of fire.

The neck and waist of the monster were encircled with a sheet of flame.

From the mouth of the blazing giant a cloud of steam issued.

Uttering fearful shrieks, the frightful-looking creature rushed among the struggling mass of

red and white rascals and pulled up with a sudden jerk.

Then the belts of fire at the neck and waist widened and suddenly sent forth bright balls of flame.

With reports like guns, the fiery missiles shot forth from the circles of flame and spread consternation among the wounded and demoralized red-skins, and the white men in the marauding band were scarcely more easy in mind.

The flaming balls shot rapidly among the robbers, darting hither and thither like stars of fire.

The terrible looking giant stood motionless on the plains, surveying the scene with eyes which sent forth two long streams of light, still sending forth those awful shrieks, as though exulting loudly over the panic.

Suddenly the noise ceased; at that very moment a bright, crimson glow appeared several feet behind the blazing monster, and soon lurid light lit up the prairie far and wide.

A voice rang out:

"Carter!"

"Here!" shouted the old guide, springing forward.

"Charge the haythenish divils, an' niver lave a man o' them alive!"

The voice was Barney Shea's.

Carter recognized the familiar tones, and his order rang out:

"Clubbed guns, pistols, and knives!" he yelled. "Charge?"

Reassured by the order, the much surprised emigrants obeyed, and in a compact mass rushed upon the enemy.

Red light flashed up brighter, and the scene was as bright and clear as the hour of noon had been.

With revengeful cries the hardy pioneers hurled themselves upon the crowd of badly scared wretches.

The belts of flame on the iron monster who surveyed the battle grew paler and paler, and the balls of fire no longer shot forth.

Three forms leaped past the fiery-eyed giant, and Charley and Frank, headed by the Irishman, rushed swiftly toward the struggling figures.

Pistol shots sounded with whip-like cracks, heavy guns whirled and hummed through the air, tomahawk clashed against knife, savage yells answered English oaths, and the scene was wild and thrilling.

Charley struck an Indian down with his knife, and then a white man leaped upon him, clutched him by the throat, and lifted a heavy bowie for a death-blow.

With a wild, Irish yell, Barney Shea made a jump for the ruffian; a heavy stick whirled through the air, sent the knife flying from the rascal's hand, and then descended fairly on his cranium, laying him out stiff.

The Indians had been badly frightened by the giant of flame.

Totally demoralized and scared out of their senses by the monster, they did not try to fight, but made every effort to escape from the vicinity of the giant.

The enraged emigrants, on their part, tried to cut them all down.

A flying hatchet struck Charley Gorse on the head and sent him headlong to the blood-stained plain.

A rifle swung by a sturdy emigrant took Barney Shea in the stomach, and with all the breath knocked out of his body by the blow, the Irishman staggered and fell.

Old Carter leaped and pranced over the battlefield like a crazy man, shouting and slashing away like mad.

With a pistol in each hand, Frank Reade stood at hand, firing whenever he saw an Indian's top-knot.

The Indian chiefs pealed forth signal cries.

They were answered from all parts of the battlefield, and instantly the red-skins made a rush towards the stream.

"Don't let the dogs escape!" shrieked old Carter, striking down a red robber with his gun. "Cut them down!"

The emigrants answered with a yell.

The frightened Sioux rushed madly away toward the stream.

The white wretches who herded with them tried to stem the rush.

The brilliant crimson glow which lit up the plains grew pale.

Frank Reade thrust his pistols into his belt and dashed away to the wagon.

He seized a package from the floor of the vehicle and scattered its contents into a burning pan.

As the lurid flames again sprang up, a dark form leaped upon him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRAIRIE FIRE.

Of course there was a cause for the prairie fire mentioned in the second chapter; and as the persons connected with its origin have some bearing upon the story, we shall present them to the reader.

It was close upon the hour of noon on the day which witnessed the events chronicled in the preceding chapter, when two mounted men drew up beneath the shade of two wide-spreading trees, standing like a pair of lone sentinels on the plains.

Beneath these two trees there bubbled up a pure spring, and the dry bushes around gave fuel sufficient for a cooking fire. The two horsemen dismounted, tied their animals to the lower limbs of the trees, and proceeded to prepare a meal.

Very soon a merry little fire was crackling and buzzing, and the more rough-and-ready looking of the two travelers was bending over it, watching a venison steak.

The one who was cooking was a man of about thirty, a tough-looking knot, and evidently one of those reckless dare-devils that are always to be found on the plains. He was a hunter, trapper and guide, and was known as Dash Hallett.

The other man was about Hallett's age, but of the English square build, and his face, his eyeglasses, and his English clothes, added to his voice, stamped him a genuine Londoner, with some of the fog of that beclouded city still sticking in his throat.

This was George Augustus Fitznoodle, who had come to this country with the idea of locating coal and iron mines in Missouri. Dash Hallett was hired by him as guide and body guard, and this was their second day out from civilization.

Of course Mr. Fitznoodle was about as green as green could be.

He had never seen a wild redskin, and he did not care to, either, now that Dash Hallett had explained to him the nature of the beast.

But he was destined to meet them very soon.

The venison was soon cooked, water was taken from the spring, and the two men sat down to eat.

A few minutes slipped by.

Dash Hallett's horse, a noble-looking black stallion that bore the name of Tempest, lifted his head and sniffed the breeze.

Then he sent forth a shrill neigh.

Dash Hallett leaped to his feet, for to him the cry was a warning one.

A slight sound came to his ears, and looking out over the plains he beheld a distant body of mounted men.

One keen glance told him that by their style of riding, the advancing men were of the Osage tribe of Indians, a cruel, blood-thirsty horde of wandering robbers.

"Redskins! Jump for your horse!"

As he spoke he leaped forward.

The stocky-built Fitznoodle also made a leap. Being somewhat heavy on his feet he did not leap far enough.

He landed squarely and fairly amid the glow-embers of the little cooking fire, and immediately the red flaming sticks went flying in all directions.

Some of the huge sparks that were raised by Fitznoodle's feet flew high up in the air, and the breeze very naturally bore them out on the plains.

George Augustus soon tumbled away from the coals.

He jumped for his horse again, and this time he got to the animal.

Dash Hallett had already sprung into his saddle.

"Mount!" he cried. "If them reds gits their paws on yer, good-bye coal mines."

"H'oh, what h'an 'orrid country," groaned the weak-nerved George Augustus, and hopped into the saddle lively. "For 'eaven's sake 'urry h'up, Mr. 'Allett."

"Follow," said Dash, and turned Tempest's head on the course they were going. "Make up yer mind to ride for yer life."

As they spurred out upon the plains a loud yell came through space to their ears.

The Indians had discovered them.

Dash Hallett looked back, and saw that the Osages were now coming onward like streaks.

As he gazed back over the plains a little fork of flame shot up.

Then another, and another still, until the eager breeze had sent the devouring element over a wide space.

Dash Hallett was a brave man, but now his cheek paled.

The prairie was on fire!

That was the knowledge that blanched his rudimentary cheek.

To the men of the plains there is something horrible and deadly in a conflagration of the grassy plains.

They know that with a good breeze it will overtake the fastest horse and outstrip the fleetest runner. They cannot battle with it, cannot strike back blow for blow in the death struggle, and that is why they all regard it with horror and fear.

It is a fearful enemy, and man and beast alike seek to fly from its scorching tongue of flame.

The flames spread with the red volumes of fire, the blue clouds of smoke rolling and plunging over the plains.

"Ride for yer life," shouted Dash. "It's eight miles to the first stream. Onward."

They put spurs to their horses and the animals darted swiftly away.

The shrieking cries of the pursuers could now be plainly heard.

The Osages were splendidly mounted, and seemed to gain on the white men.

There was a wide strip of land that had borne no grass, close to the trees. Of course the fire swept away from there, and thus the Osages were enabled to dash aside from the half-circle of fire and push swiftly on after the two men.

Thus the hissing flames became the pursuers of both parties.

The red-skins gained upon the whites.

Both parties were dashing along at a high rate of speed.

The grandly beautiful flames, a most thrilling spectacle, spread out in a fan-like shape for miles.

Wild animals could be seen leaping madly in advance of the flames, and natural enemies now sought flight side by side from this terrible common foe.

The tall, dry grass succumbed rapidly to the tongues of fire; the smoke rolled over the prairie in dense clouds; the frightened beasts leaped madly in advance of the fire fiend; the red and white mounted men were flying before its deathly breath, and altogether the scene was grand beyond description.

A loud crack pealed forth.

The leader of the Osages had fired upon the fugitives.

Fitznoodle's horse bounded madly in the air and screamed with pain.

The red-skins were within range.

The Englishman's horse was only wounded, and bounded onward at still greater speed than before.

Dash Hallett unslung a long rifle from his back, and turned easily in his saddle.

Their pursuers, numbering about a score or so, were coming on at full speed.

In advance of the rest rode a gaily-dressed chief, mounted upon a beautiful cream.

"You're the cuss!" muttered Dash Hallett.

His rifle leaped to his shoulder.

A spiteful crack followed, and the chief of the reds tumbled headlong to the ground, while his riderless cream dashed madly away to the left.

Scarcely had he fallen before another in the band spurred forward and took the lead, and without losing a moment the band swept swiftly on.

Still gazing back, Dash Hallett saw some of the rifles of the pursuing party go up in the air, and he shouted to Fitznoodle:

"Duck, they're going to fire!"

Hardly had the words escaped his lips when he shrill echoes rang out, and several bullets whistled past his ears.

A shriek sounded on the air.

Dash turned in his saddle, and was just in time to see his comrade fall to the hard plain, while his horse staggered a few feet forward and then fell dead, or dying, to the ground.

"Poor Englisher," murmured Dash. "It's all up with him. He's gone up the flume."

With one pitying glance at his prostrate companion, Dash Hallett sped on.

"I'll avenge him," he gritted between his set teeth, and with practiced hands he very quickly reloaded his rifle, his fleet horse bounding along on a dead run while the charges were rammed home.

He placed the cap on the nipple, turned in the saddle and viewed the wildly yelling horde.

The new leader was just shouting out an order.

Dash Hallett lifted his rifle to his right shoulder, took a quick aim, covering the head of the chieftain, and fired.

At the very second that his finger touched the trigger the cavalcade wheeled and turned to the left.

The bullet which had been intended for the leader pierced the brain of another member of the band, and with a wild, despairing shriek, he tumbled to the ground.

Hallett reined in for a moment.

The Osages were describing a graceful sweep to the left; one that would carry them out of the half-circle covered by the rapidly advancing flames.

Hallett was puzzled.

Could it be possible that they were going to let him escape without making another effort to capture or kill him?

This thought flashed through his mind as he sat motionless on his horse, watching the reds with keen eyes.

They kept on for some distance; in fact, until they were altogether clear from the fan-like track of the fire.

Then they made a gradual turn, and took up a course that would eventually bring them back within the half-circle again.

What could it mean? Dash Hallett was puzzled.

At this moment a low, rumbling noise, as though the feet of a thousand steeds were spurning the hard earth, was borne to the ears of the hunter.

The rumbling noise came from the extreme right and slightly to the rear.

Dash Hallett turned from contemplating the Indians, and then he saw the reason of their strange tactics.

An enormous herd of buffaloes, numbering some thousands, were rushing in a huge, compact body across the plains, hemmed in by the half-circle of flame.

Like a mighty, resistless torrent they were bearing down upon him.

"Away!" shrieked Dash Hallett, and like an arrow from a bow the noble stallion shot forward.

The Indians were now about half a mile away to the left, spurring their horses and shrieking like demons.

The buffaloes were probably a little further away, on the other hand.

Like some living meteor, Tempest sped over the plain.

The ground began to roll, small hillocks rising at intervals.

Soon there appeared before him a small rocky hill, cut in two by the brook known as Shallow Stream.

Thus his course was barred by a chasm of fully twenty feet.

The Indians now changed their course and spurred towards him, while the buffaloes on their part, hemmed him in.

What a situation!

A score of enemies on the left hand, hot for his blood; a herd of maddened brutes on his right hand; a terrific sea of fire in his rear; and across his course yawned a chasm deep and wide.

On sped the horse; the brink of the hill is reached; the leap is before him; a desperate light gleams in the hunter's eyes, and his voice rings out:

"On, Tempest, on!"

The stallion leaps bravely out into space.

CHAPTER V.

CHARLEY'S PERIL.

WHEN Frank felt himself graspen by human hands he did not lose his head.

He merely twisted his head around to find out who held him.

It was one of the white robbers.

"Die, ye cursed imp!" cried this amiable and mild gentleman of the prairie, and lifted his blood-stained knife with the charitable idea of saving the boy all future trouble, etc.

But the plucky inventor of the steam man was too full of neat little tricks and ideas to allow this.

He merely kicked the fellow heavily on the shins, giving a regular cap-lifter with the toe of his boot, and the foolish chap was silly enough to drop him, while he clapped his hand to his knee and set up a most dolorous yell.

Frank leaped backwards, ripped forth a revolver, and sent a heavy ball tearing through the robber's shoulder.

The wretch fell to the ground.

Frank leaped lightly over the prostrate form and dashed out to where the battling faction were still dealing blow for blow, the brave emigrants seeking to thoroughly exterminate the cruel banditti of the plains.

The fight was now a running one in more ways than one, for the terrified redskins were trying their level best to run away from the infuriated pioneers.

Barney Shea, who, it will be remembered, was knocked breathless by accident, had recovered his wind, and was upon his feet again in the midst of danger, yelling and shouting like an Indian, and laying about him with a long, heavy stick, as though fully possessed by a demon.

The shrieks of the wounded and dying, the cries and curses of the living, and the loud cracks of the firearms made up a din that was horrible, and the fighting, shooting, and stabbing, the maddened forms of the struggling men contending

bitterly for life and liberty, made up a scene that was forever impressed on Frank Reade's memory.

But as the boy reached the edge of the struggling line of battle, he heard a deep voice sounding high above the hum of the contest.

Frank stood perfectly motionless for a brief moment, and he bent down and held his ear close to the ground.

Tramp—tramp—tramp, came the sounds, rapid and regular.

To Frank's ears it appeared that an enemy was advancing.

Other ears were better trained than those of the New York boy, and soon a shout rang out that caused a cessation of active hostilities.

The warning cry pealed from the lips of old Carter, and the words of the guide were taken up and repeated by a score of frightened men.

"Wild horses on a stampede!"

Only the men who belong to those great plains of the west know the full import of that cry; only the men who have witnessed the great sight know how grand it is, and how terrible.

In solid troops they rush over the prairies, headed by a captain, and woe to the poor traveler who bars their path. Their course is as resistless as that of the torrent which sweeps down the mountain side, and they sweep down all before them.

They were struck with terror.

Snap Carter's voice rang out clear and audible above all others;

"Dash for the woods!"

"Halt!"

The countermand came sharply upon the heels of the order.

The men had turned to obey the command of the guide, but when that ringing word saluted their ears, they stood irresolute.

"Halt!" again the order was given, and then Snap Carter turned upon the speaker, who was none other than Frank Reade.

"What do ye—"

"Obey orders," said Frank, breaking in on his remonstrance. "Every man of you drop down here. You could never enter the little grove alive."

The men obeyed, feeling that they could well trust this determined boy.

Frank sprang back to the wagon.

The steam valves were hissing under a high pressure of steam.

In his fight with the robber who had grappled with him, Frank had upset the pan of red fire.

He turned the dish upright again, threw in another small package of powder, and then leaped up to his driving-seat.

He pulled the rod cautiously, and the man of steam circled slowly around, and in less than half a minute was directly in front of the crouching men, his blazing eyes looking out in the darkness.

The crimson light from the powder now leaped up, spreading a brilliant glow far over the plains.

The immense troops of wild horses could now be seen advancing, the gorgeous hue of the chemical light falling with thrilling effect upon their ranks.

Frank pulled the whistle-cord, and the fearful voice of the steam man uttered a succession of loud yells.

The leaders grew alarmed when the shriek of the steam monster burst upon their ears.

Their eyes were half blinded by the chemical light, which, added to the fiery eyes of the steam man, made the surroundings as light as day.

The steeds in the foremost ranks began to kick and plunge.

They tried to stop the progress of the vast numbers behind them.

As well might a few men try to hold an army in check.

In vain the captains halted. The vast throng in the rear still came steadily onward, and the leaders were forced to advance.

The aggregated force of the numbers behind them forced the foremost ones to move on, and this they were compelled to do in the face of the terrifying steam man.

Then took place what Frank Reade had calculated upon when ordering the emigrants to crouch behind the wagon.

The vast herd of horses could not be turned by the leaders so as to avoid the frightful looking object in their path, the leaders were forced to divide, and pass on either side of the steam man, the only in their course following like well-trained soldiers.

Steadily onward pressed the long and wide columns, the glaring light casting weird shadows over the immense army of moving steeds.

The wounded and dying who lie beyond the steam man are doomed to certain death, for the divided ranks reunite beyond the point of division

and tramp resistlessly onward, crushing and moaning in their course.

A cry of horror rings out upon the air, and Snap Carter shouts:

"Look at the boy!"

All follow the direction of the guide's extended hand, and Frank's heart gave a great leap as he beheld Charley Gorse.

The Missouri boy was in peril.

He had just got upon his feet, and was now standing erect some few hundred feet in advance of the swiftly-moving column.

"He will be crushed—he will be killed!" groaned Frank, wringing his hands together, as he took in the full danger to which his young cousin was exposed.

Like the trump of doom the shrill neigh of the foremost captain rang out as he bore down upon Charley.

The brave boy stood motionless, his fine, bold face colorless, his attitude one of calm despair.

Frank shut off the whistle, and, like one fascinated, fixed his eyes upon Charley.

Nothing could now be done to turn aside the countless steeds, and the threatened lad stood squarely in their path.

"He is doomed!" sounded from the lips of the awe-struck emigrants.

Frank's heart grew sick, but still he kept his gaze fixed upon the leaders.

Three of them sprang forward in advance of the columns, and with loud screams of anger rushed upon the boy.

Firm as a rock stood Charley Gorse in the perilous path.

As the foremost steed, a magnificent stallion, reached him, Charley bounded nimbly up into the air and landed fairly upon the animal's back.

A triumphant shout rang out upon the night air, and then Charley Gorse flew off in the darkness.

CHAPTER VI.

GEORGE AUGUSTUS FITZNOODLE MAKES A SPEECH.

WHEN heavily-built Mr. Fitznoodle tumbled headlong to the grassy plain he was not dead nor wounded. His stirrup-strap broke, and over he went, while his wounded and dying horse also fell.

The fall had stunned the Englishman, and as it turned out it was very lucky for him that he appeared dead when the furious savages galloped past him, else they might have riddled him with bullets.

When they had gone by, the Englishman got upon his feet.

A few yards away lay the dead body of his horse.

The flames were rolling up towards him with frightful rapidity.

How could he escape them?

The thought rushed through his agonized mind, but no avenue of escape was open to him. He was a poor runner; his breath was short; he was already exhausted from his ride, and so it was useless to think of eluding the fire-fiend by flight.

What should he do?

A man is forced to think fast when such an enemy as fire is threatening his life.

Fitznoodle's eyes fell upon the body of his horse.

The creature was stone dead.

In a moment a plan was thought of that afforded a bare chance of escape.

He leaped quickly forward.

The flames were close at hand.

The feet of the fallen steed were extended in the direction of the advancing flames.

Fitznoodle threw himself down behind the back of the dead horse and threw his coat up over his head.

A moment later the air grew hot and dense, his throat felt parched and dry, his eye-balls seemed almost bursting, and a mighty sound like the roaring of great waters sounded in his ears.

Then the fiery tide swept over him with its scorching breath, and a moment later the Englishman stood erect, unharmed.

He was forced to sit on the dead horse for some time in order to allow the hot plain to grow cool, and then he began to look about him with the idea of making tracks in some direction.

"H'I really don't know what h'in the world to do," soliloquized Fitznoodle, gazing blankly over the blackened prairie. "Ow I h'am t'ing to h'extricate myself from this h'awful situation h'I really don't know. 'Ere h'am h'I, George Augustus Fitznoodle, left alone h'on this vast plain by my h'inattentive body guard. H'I ope that 'e'll soon return, for 'pon my soul h'I think h'm lost."

He took a pull at his flask to clear his rather husky voice, and also to raise his drooping spir-

its, and impatiently awaited Dash Hallett's return—he having conceived the idea that the hunter would come back to look for him.

He little thought that at that very moment the man for whom he looked was hemmed in by terrible foes.

But ere long he heard sounds that told of approaching feet, and looked up with the expectation of beholding Hallett.

His eager face grew long when he beheld the Osages moving towards him.

It would have been perfectly useless to run, so Fitznoodle remained seated on the horse, wondering within himself who and what these Indians really were, and also wondering what they were going to do with him.

The Indians puzzled him.

He could not rightly understand what they were.

He had conceived the idea that they were red negroes, and having met with slaves in the south and south-west, he was disposed to look upon a full-blooded Comanche Indian as a plantationer, a little off color.

The Osages cantered up to him, and one of the reds, leaping from the back of his horse, laid his hand upon the Englishman's face, and then felt of his nose.

"No h'indignities, h'if you please," cried out the excitable George Augustus, giving the very inquisitive Osage a violent push that sent him over. "H'I h'am a true born son h'of h'old h'England, sir, h'and you must not pull a h'Englishman's nose."

Probably the Osage was not aware of this interesting fact.

As it was, he leaped to his feet, pulled out a long knife, and would have made very short work of the Londoner had not one of the chieftains interfered.

The Cockney was bound with a rope, although he protested loudly against it.

"H'it's a h'insult," he declared, turning toward the chief. "H'if your lordship h'objects to my trespassing h'on your land, h'I h'am willing to compromise the matter for any small sum, but h'I decidedly h'object to being brutally 'anded."

"Ugh!" grunted the gaily bedecked leader of the Osage band. "White man he talk heap like squaw. Ugh! no brave. He chicken heart now, so we burn him! Ugh, whogh! He make good fire and roast like chicken. His heart will not burn, and me, Wotzerponum, great chief of Osage, will eat heart!"

Then to his braves he shouted:

"Ah-kela-kala-qua!"

The astonished George Augustus was hurried along, and in a short time the grove from which the Cockney had started was reached by the savage band.

They immediately tied the speculator in coal and iron up to a tree, and piled a great amount of twigs and branches around him, filling in the bottom part with dry leaves.

Then the indignant George Augustus began to get frightened, and lifting up his voice impressively, he addressed his captors.

An Indian is ready to be talked to death at almost any time, for oratory is only next to heroism in their estimation; therefore, they listened attentively, while the eloquent George Augustus spoke:

"Your lordship, h'and gentlemen h'all," began the Londoner. "H'I warn you that the step you are about taking is h'illegal, h'and h'if h'it was known to the British Consul the h'insult—h'I repeat it, sir—the h'insult would be wiped h'out h'in the blood h'of your nation. The British lion is h'amiable so long h'as 'e is left h'alone, but h'if you h'arouse him h'in this manner, beware! H'I warn you h'again. The British lion will roar; his tail will soon go wiggledly-waggledly, h'and then look h'out for 'is teeth. H'I h'am 'elpless, but though h'I cannot fight for my rights, my people will not be slow h'in h'asserting them. 'Arm but a 'air of my 'ead, h'and the speedy h'action h'of h'an h'indignant h'and h'outraged people shall prove to you that the British lion h'is not to be trifled with. Release me this very moment, h'or the h'insult shall be h'eradicated with blood—my lord, with blood!"

The Indians had not the faintest idea what it was all about, but they sent up an approving shout, and then a tall brave approached the funeral pyre, bearing a hissing and burning torch in his hand.

CHAPTER VII.

BARNEY SHEA TAKES A RIDE.

MORNING dawned bright, clear, and fair over the plains.

The emigrant train had been well guarded during the night, and now the victorious pioneers came forth from their short sleep reinvigorated,

and determined to push on in their westward course in spite of the white and red robbers of the plains.

The steam man stands just within the shade of the trees that grow on the outskirts of the grove. Frank Reade is full of business, polishing and oiling his machine, getting up steam, and arranging the wagon for a journey.

Half a dozen of the hardy emigrants lay sleeping beneath the sods of the blood-stained prairie, and yet there is no sorrowing for them, "for," said Snap Carter:

"They went up the flume with thar boots on, an' their guns atween thar fingers, an' that's the way I want to die when this old rover is called for. They give up the ghost while they was defendin' men with gray hair, an' lots of women and young uns, and so thar's nothin' to cry about."

The rest seemed to share the sentiment of the old guide.

Certainly the reader would not have been impressed with melancholy ideas could he or she have looked upon our friend Barney Shea.

The rollicking Irishman was seated astride an empty box, scraping away with might and main upon a half-way decent sort of a fiddle, and occasionally breaking out with snatches of Irish love ditties or songs of Erin's glory.

This fiddle was Barney's most valued piece of property.

He carried it everywhere with him, and as he was constantly on the move, the fiddle had traveled a deal in its day, but still the Patlander was able to draw very good music from its well worn strings.

He was just breaking out with some Irish ditty when Frank Reade approached him.

"Top o' the morning to ye, me fine gossoon," said Barney, ceasing his scraping.

"The heel of it to you," laughed Frank. "What are you going to do with yourself?"

"Whin is it ye mane?"

"To-day."

"Faith, I s'pose I'll be afther trampin' along wid won o' the teams."

"Why not go with me?"

"Go wid ye?"

"Yes; I am going to hunt Charley up, if he is to be found, and I want somebody along to help me. Now you would be just the man for me. You don't get any pay for keeping with the train, do you?"

"Divil the ha'p'orth."

"Then you'll not lose anything," said the boy. "Come with me."

"An' ye'll bring me back to the thrain whin I want ye to?"

"I will," said Frank, "but I don't believe th' you'll want to leave me or Charley when ye see what fun we have, and what adventures we through. But come, I must get on my way. Have you anything that you would like to take with you?"

"Me fiddle."

"Anything else?"

"An' me shillelah," said Barney. "Thin, ye see, I'm fully prepared for frinds or foes. Me ole fiddle in times o' pace, and me blackthorn stick for a row."

"That's a good idea," said Frank. "Are you ready now?"

"I am."

"Then come on," said Frank. "I am goin' right over that stream."

The proprietor of the steam man had taken a little supply of wood from the grateful emigrants, and also some dried beef and other articles of food. The stream supplied the water for boiler and tanks, and he was ready for a journey that might last for two or three days.

He bade farewell to the old guide and the pioneer, mounted his seat, with Barney at his side, sounded the whistle as a sort of farewell, and then turned on steam with practiced hand.

The man of metal ran away from the grove, and in a short time had plashed through Shallow Stream, the wagon only being immersed up to the hubs of the wheels.

Then swiftly away over the vast plains, for it was easy to follow the beaten track formed by the hard feet of the prairie steeds.

The section taken by the broad army of horses that had swept by the night before, was marked by trampled grass as far as the eye could see.

Frank's only object was to keep on this wide beaten track, hoping thereby to come across his Cousin Charley.

"He must be somewhere on the road, dead or alive," thought the boy. "Perhaps he has been flung from the back of that stallion he leaped upon, and may even now be lying wounded on the plain. I will never give up the search for him until I am sure that he is dead."

With long strides the giant traveler sped over the smooth ground.

Some hours passed away, and still that ste

track stretched away before them, its expanse only broken by a little grove which appeared not far away.

No sign could be seen of Charley.

"We must make for that island (the name given to the little groves that dot the plains), and have some dinner under its trees," said Frank, who was getting hungry.

"That's sensible," approvingly said Barney. "Me insides have been crying out to me for the past hour, so they have."

In a few minutes the steam man dashed up to the island and came to a halt in the shade of its trees.

Barney and Frank leaped to the ground, the Irishman holding his fiddle and his bow in his hands.

"I'll get the dinner," said Frank.

"And I'll be ather playin' ye a chune," said the jolly Irishman. "I'll use this black log here for a sate."

He seated himself astride of the black log, as he supposed it to be, and had just got his fiddle into position when a chorus of loud yells rang through the grove; the log raised up with a jerk, and before Barney knew what was the matter, he was speeding over the plains on the back of a wounded black buffalo, while a party of well-mounted Indians dashed after him with cries of hate and vengeance.

"Hoorah!" roared Barney Shea, throwing his leg under the buffalo's belly. "Come on, ye murderin spalpeens! Listen, while I play ye a chune that'll warm the cockles o' yer heart!"

And with the red-skins in hot pursuit, Barney Shea, safely mounted on his woolly steed, put his fiddle in position and played them "The Heart That Once Goes Through Tara's Halls."

"Och!" cried Barney, "this is illigant, intirely."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LIVING BRIDGE.

WITH Dash Hallett clinging like a cat to his back, the brave horse leaped far out from the brink of the rocky chasm.

There was a ringing and buzzing sound in the rider's ears as the steed vaulted powerfully through the air; and then there came a sudden shock as the stallion landed safely on the opposite side of the leap.

Dash Hallett was safe!

He leaped from his horse, and the noble animal, thoroughly exhausted, rolled over on its side and gasped for breath.

It had nobly performed its duty; but that last tremendous leap, succeeding the long and severe run, proved too much for the stallion, and Tempest was dying.

Dash Hallett looked back over the sloping ground and yawning abyss, but no sign was to be seen of the red-skins.

They had turned back in order to escape the double chances of death that awaited them at the leap.

The mighty thundering sound that boomed out heavily on the air, told him that the immense platoon of buffaloes were still rushing on in advance of the flames.

"Curse the reds!" savagely muttered the hunter, as he gazed upon the form of his dying horse, and brushed a tear from his eye. "I wish they had come on, for I should have knocked over enough of the wretches to avenge Tempest, and poor Fitznoodle, too. I'll hang on to that crew until I wipe every imp out. Poor old Tempest! we've been travelin' together many a year, and now we've got to part. Curse them Osages! I swear I'll stick to 'em as long as there's a single red murderer left alive for to squeak or draw a knife."

The horse breathed heavier and heavier with each breath, and in a few moments rolled over and died.

"Gone!" said Dash Hallett, looking sorrowfully at his dead companion. "Well, it only makes a longer list agin the reds, and I'll die tryin' to square the debt."

The thundering boom of the approach of the thousands of rapidly approaching hoofs told the hunter that the herd was swiftly approaching the edge of the awful chasm, hemmed in by the fan-shaped wall of fire.

Hallett knew by experience what must surely happen.

He removed the saddle and bridle from the body of the dead horse, and took them with him to a secure post behind a tall and strong tree which sprouted up from the crevices between the rock.

Nearer and nearer sounded the thundering tread.

Thousands of horny hoofs were beating the plains.

A continued roaring sound, as of the voice of

a mighty mountain torrent, rang in the ears of the watching hunter.

Dash Hallett knew that flying before a prairie fire as they were, it would be vain for any of the foremost ones to halt, or attempt to obstruct the progress of the main body, as the throng in the rear still rushes onward, and the leaders are compelled to advance, even though destruction awaits them.

The hunter had peeped over the edge of the chasm, and knew full well that many of the herd must be forced over the brink, only to fall through the empty space and crash their bones on the rock-broken waters which appeared below.

Silently he watched for the appearance of the brute army.

The thundering tread approached nearer still, and the foremost ranks, an array of splendid bulls, ran at full speed up the shelving hill to the brink of the abyss.

As the foremost ones arrive there they rear on their hind legs and attempt to turn back from the awful chasm.

Ah! there is no possible retreat now, no chance of escape!

The terrified leaders shrink back from the brink with terror.

The solid ranks behind, terrified by the near approach of the prairie fire, dash forward with increasing speed.

The doomed bulls, standing on the very brink, roar and kick, bite and gore, and in their way, attempt to evade the certain death that awaits them.

They are fighting against fate!

The crowd in the rear, maddened and desperate, spurred on by the singeing flames, rush on with increasing impetuosity, and the aggregate force hurls the struggling leaders successively into the rocky stream where certain death awaits them.

The maddened followers rushed blindly on, and dozens at a time were hurled into the gulf by the steady pressure behind.

In a few moments hundreds had fallen from the brink of the precipice.

The chasm became closed with the bodies of the dead and wounded buffaloes, and in less than three minutes the largest portion of the mighty herd of beasts were dashing by the concealed hunter, for the carcasses of their fallen companions had afforded them a path across the abyss.

"By Jupiter!" muttered Hallett. "There's more good buffaloes gone to thunder than I'll ever kill in my days. It was wonderful—wonderful. By Jupiter, that's the first time in my life that ever I see a livin' bridge."

The buffaloes continued rushing past Hallett's resting-place for some time, and after them came numerous other animals, driven from their lairs and haunts by the prairie-fire.

While they were passing by, Hallett noticed that several bears, grizzly and black ones, formed part of the flying cavalcade, and he could not help shuddering when he reckoned on a man's chances for life among the terrified host.

"They'd chaw him up in just two quivers of a lamb's tail," said Hallett to himself.

When they had all gone by, Hallett arose to his feet and gazed wonderingly after the swiftly-moving columns, for it was as wonderful a sight as he had ever beheld.

The afternoon was on the wane before he was enabled to move away.

"Five miles to the lone tree from here," muttered the hunter, as he tightened his belt. "Well, there's something of a storm coming up, and this place won't afford much shelter, so I'll tramp to the big oak."

He shouldered his rifle, and tramped away, just as the sky grew dark with a long, black cloud.

A few rain drops soon pattered down on the traveler's head, but the storm or shower fell further away. Steadily onward tramped Dash, and just as nightfall came on, he rested himself under the wide-spreading branches of a noble oak that had stood the storms and blasts of fifty long years.

He ate a rude meal of dried meat, washed down with some whisky, and was then thinking of lying down beneath the tree when it occurred to him that the safer place for him would be among the thickly-woven branches of the tree.

He was a good climber, and in spite of the darkness was soon up in the tree.

He secured a lodging in a forked branch, at the distance of about thirty feet from the bottom of the tree, and nicely shut in by the neatly interwoven twigs and leaves, he began to nod his head.

The night grew pitchy dark, as black as Dash Hallett had ever seen.

He must have been asleep when the sound of a rough object scratching over the bark of the tree awakened him, and with every sense on the alert he listened for the repetition of the sound.

Scratch—scratch—scratch!

The hunter listened keenly, and he knew very well that some animal was crawling over the tree in his direction.

He very soon decided that it must be one of the bears he had noticed among the flying cavalcade of wild beasts.

The sounds drew nearer and nearer, and the man of the plains clutched his knife with one hand, while he placed his other hand on the barrel of his rifle.

He carefully drew the weapon up in front of him as he sat securely in the fork of the branch, and felt with his fingers to see that it was in good shooting condition.

His knife was loosened in his belt ready for instant use.

The scratching sound ceased as the foliage of the fork was stirred, and two piercing bright eyes flamed for a moment upon the waiting Hallett.

A low growl rang out with a rumbling note.

"A black bear!" decided Dash Hallett, as he covered the space between the two flaming orbs with his rifle. "Take this pill, ye varmint!"

He pulled the trigger.

There was a flash and a report, and then came a growl of fury.

Hallett knew what that meant.

The monster must have moved as he pulled the trigger, and the bullet which was aimed to go between his eyes, had taken lodgment in the creature's body.

The infuriated beast was crawling toward him. This he could tell by the near approach of the flaming eyes.

Hallett placed his gun behind him, with the strap securing it to his shoulders, and drew his keen knife.

The weapon was long, heavy, sharp on both sides of the blade, and the end had a point like a needle.

Grasping this formidable weapon firmly in his strong hand, the hunter awaited the time to strike.

The bear slowly drew near.

At length Hallett could make out the huge outlines of the long, dark body.

It was a black bear of unusual size, and, now that it was wounded, would prove an implacable enemy.

The bear was advancing cautiously, probably feeling insecure on account of the wound it had received.

At this time Dash noticed that the tree was shaking and trembling.

Soon a thundering rumbling came to his keen ears, and he knew that the hard plain was vibrating beneath the tread of thousands of advancing hoofs.

He thought that the buffaloes might be coming back again, but that idea was soon knocked in the head, for he was enabled to locate the direction of the sound.

It came from the direction of Shallow Stream, and a few points off the course he had taken.

"Either buffaloes or wild horses," decided Hallett.

All this time he kept his eyes fixed upon the slowly advancing bear.

At length the latter was within reach, and with all his force, Hallett struck at the full neck of the growling brute.

The sharp point sank deep into the neck of the beast, and hastily withdrawing the heavy weapon, the hunter lunged forth again and again, at the broad mark, until the blood was heard falling upon the leaves.

Louder and louder sounded the regular tramp—tramp, of the on-coming horde.

Whatever they were, the advancing columns were heading for the tree.

The bear's many wounds rendered it doubly savage, and it crawled more quickly upon the bold hunter.

Hallett was forced to retreat, little by little, step by step, until he had reached the end of the bough.

On came the enraged bear.

It was useless to think of striking at the monster now, so daring Dash Hallett laid his hands on the bough, and swung by his arms from the limb.

Swiftly on came the thundering army of moving animals, the foremost ones rapidly advancing on a line that would bring them fairly under the tree.

As they drew near, the bear cautiously crowded towards the hunter's hands.

Bruin stretched out his neck and made a most vicious snap at the man's fingers.

Hallett let go his hold.

He fell squarely astride the back of one of the steeds, and at the same moment discovered the

fact that the horse had another rider, and that rider, who proved to be Charley Gorse, cried out: "Easy, there, mister, you've darned near broken this child's head."

"How the deuce is this?" cried Hallett.

He had kept on the stallion from force of habit, although the maddened brute leaped and pranced fearfully.

"How's what?" demanded Charley.

"That you're among this drove o' wild horses?"

"Easy enough!" said the daring boy. "I was in a tight scrape, and I got out of it the best way I could. Nothin' when you get used to it."

Then he told Dash, in brief terms, what had taken place that evening at the emigrants' camp by the Shallow Stream, and in return Hallett gave him a rough account of the thrilling dangers he had passed through.

"But this won't do," said Hallett, "we must get this animal away from the herd, or our lives may be lost. Hold on to my clothes with all your grip, and dig your knees hard in the horse's ribs."

Charley obeyed.

Hallett leaned forward, caught the stallion by the nose with his strong right hand, pulled the horse's head around, and at the same time yelled at him.

The animal bounded away in advance of the herd, and under Dash's grip, followed his nose, so that in a few moments he was on an exactly opposite course to that taken by the herd, which could still be heard thundering away in the distance.

Goaded to a perfect frenzy by the shouts and blows bestowed on him by his fearless riders, the noble stallion sped over the hard, level plain like some living star, the white foam streaking his sides as he dashed madly on through the darkness of the night.

On—on, with the shrill whistle of the prairie winds in their ears, until suddenly the good steed uttered a neigh of terror, and stopped so suddenly that his riders were hurled to the ground.

CHAPTER IX.

GEORGE AUGUSTUS FITZNOODLE.

"H'I say!" indignantly cried the much-worked up George Augustus Fitznoodle, as the noble brave approached him with the torch blazing in his hand, "you really don't h'intend to put h'into practice the 'orrible h'American custom of cremation, do you?"

Now that really was the full intention of the torch-bearer, but as he didn't know what the Cockney was blustering about, of course he could not answer him.

He bent down and inserted the blazing stick between the leaves and twigs which formed the base of what seemed destined to be poor Fitznoodle's funeral pyre.

"'Old h'on—'old h'on!" vociferated the alarmed Englishman. "H'I can't stand this 'ere sort o' thing, you know. H'I h'am not going to be cremated, you know."

How he was to prevent it did not appear very clearly to the Londoner, but he was bound to bluster and blow while he had any breath left in his body.

The torch set fire to the small stuff at the base of the pile, and the little tongues of red flame began to dance and leap around the Englishman's form.

"H'oh, dear—h'oh, dear!" he groaned, as the little forks of flame began to make things very sultry for him. "H'I wish h'in the very bottom of my 'eart that h'I'd never left h'old h'England to come to this blasted 'eathen land, prospecting for iron and coal. H'oh, my legs—h'oh, my legs!"

He turned to the grinning chief, the great and proud Motzer-Ponum, and cried out appealingly to him:

"Won't your lordship 'ave the kindness to stop this h'infamous proceeding?"

"Ugh, whogh!" contemptuously grunted the noble chief, eying the pleading Fitznoodle with unbounded disgust. "White man, he heap talk all same like squaw. Him heart all same like papoose's heart! Why him sing death song, and then cry like squaw! Ugh!"

The idea of singing his death song was evidently a great compliment, when it is considered that the red chieftain referred to the Cockney's high flown speech.

The flames began to grow very uncomfortable, and the suffering George Augustus renewed his curses upon his stupidity for leaving his native land.

But a mighty power intervened to save the Englishman's life.

The sky had been for some time overcast, and now the storm, of which Dash Hallett had felt a

few straggling drops, bust over the heads of the warriors and their joyful prisoner.

The rain descended in torrents and drenched them all.

Of course the fire was almost instantaneously extinguished.

Motzer-Ponum gave orders to clear away the twigs and stumps, and other stuff around the very much-pleased Fitznoodle, and the relieved Londoner was cut loose from the tree to which he had been bound.

The storm was furious, but, like some very hasty tempers, it spent its fury in a very few minutes, and then all was as calm and serene as it was before.

But the nice little amusement of the fire-loving Motzer-Ponum was frustrated. The surroundings were all soaked, so the device of burning the prisoner at that time was knocked out of time, although the warriors kindly suggested that they might slice the poor fellow up and cook him at leisure, little by little.

This proposition was, however, rejected by the high and mighty Motzer-Ponum, who called a very wet council of war to decide what was to be the fate of the prisoner.

Every savage warrior, important or inferior, had to have his say, and that say amounted to just about so much, whether it contained more or less ideas.

They all knew what would be the ultimate and inevitable decision arrived at, but for all that they had to talk. Pow-wow is part and parcel of an Indian's character, and he always seems ready to hire a hall.

When he saw the savage red men collect around him in solemn conclave, the ever ready George Augustus took advantage of the opportunity to ventilate some of his foreign views.

"It would h'appear that your lordship's followers have not united h'in their h'expressions of h'opinion," said the consequential George Augustus Fitznoodle, waving one hand toward Motzer-Ponum in a dramatic manner. "Now, h'if h'I might suggest the h'idea, would h'it not be an h'advisable step h'on your lordship's part to h'appoint a sort of h'arbitration to h'adjust the matter h'at h'issue? What that matter h'is h'I h'am 'ighly desirous h'of h'ascertaining, but h'at present h'I h'am 'holly h'ignorant h'of."

"Ugh, whogh!" grunted Motzer-Ponum.

"Ugh!" murmured the warriors.

They were very much pleased with George Augustus Fitznoodle's oratorical style of speaking, but what it was all about they had not the faintest idea.

"Shall Motzer-Ponum, chief of the great Osages, be heard?" demanded the chieftain of his dusky followers, speaking in the Osage tongue. "Shall his voice, speaking wisdom, decide the fate of the captive?"

"It shall, let him speak," returned the wild warriors of the West.

"'Tis well," said the chieftain. "Brothers, we have lost some of our noble warriors since we left our council fires."

"Ugh!" grunted the noble red men.

"We shall be asked for them when we return to our village," said the speaker, "and if we are almost empty handed the squaws will laugh at us, the papposes shoot arrows at our scalp-locks. But if we bring them a prisoner, a white prisoner, to torture, to sport with, to insult, to burn! ah, then they cannot laugh at us. Let us carry the white orator to our village, and then we will deliver him up to the widows of the men who are gone to the happy hunting grounds. Motzer-Ponum has said his say!"

The wild savages set up a shout of approval, and by order of the chief they bound the poor Englishman to a horse, strapping the bound man securely to the steed.

"'Er, h'I say, 'old h'on!" remonstrated the frightened George Augustus, as he felt his head touching the horse's neck. "H'I'm not used to playing Mazeppa, you know. I can't allow this sort h'of thing, you know. It's almost enough to give a fellow the cerebro spinal-meningitis, you know!"

The Osages didn't know anything about the disease.

They took up their course for the village of the Osage tribe, distant twenty miles, and with the bound Fitznoodle riding passively in their midst they coursed over the plains.

On—on, through the pitchy darkness of that memorable night, never drawing rein until the village was reached, where, amidst the greatest possible amount of noise, bustle and confusion, George Augustus was handed over to the widows of the slain men.

These widows were three in number, and they all made a rush for George Augustus as soon as that person was placed on the ground, and in a moment their fingers were in his wool.

With a yell of agony the Englishman sprang to his feet.

"Ladies," he appealingly cried, holding out his hands to the dusky beauties; "h'if h'I h'address ladies, h'I beg of you to 'ave compassion h'on h'an h'innocent man. H'if h'I 'ave done h'anything whatsoever to provoke you, h'if h'I 'ave wronged you, h'only name the reparation, h'and h'if h'it h'is h'in my power h'I'll assure you that h'it shall be made."

One savage beauty understood a little of English, and she spoke up boldly to the excited George Augustus.

"You marry Shoffusguy?" she asked, striking herself on her breast to make him understand that by Shoffusguy she meant herself. "She make you good wife, you make her good husband, all same like dead warrior."

"Certainly," said George Augustus, thinking of the cremation scene. "In fact, I'm willing to marry the lot of you."

The lovely Widow Shoffusguy proclaimed the fact that the prisoner had consented to be her husband.

Immediately the other two widows raised a great cry, and each in turn demanded the prisoner as a husband.

The beautiful Widow Shoffusguy threw herself in front of the bewildered George Augustus, and with a loud yell, drew forth a knife.

The other two widows also drew weapons.

The warriors stood gloomily aloof, for they dare not interfere with the bereaved women. Three shouts of defiance rang out, three blades flashed in the firelight, and then the three widows closed in combat.

CHAPTER X.

HAULING WATER.

It is doubtful whether Barney Shea was one mite more surprised than was Frank Reade over what had taken place.

He had heard a sudden chorus of wild yells, he had seen the form of his rollicking companion suddenly rise upon the back of the wounded beast he had mistaken for a black log, and then, with a great noise, many objects flitted past him, and before he could utter a word, there was Barney, skimming over the plains on his unusual steed, followed by a yelling band of well-mounted Indians.

As he stood gazing in astonishment at the strange scene, the melodious strain of "The Harp that Once Through Tara's Halls" came to his ears on the breeze.

He recognized the fact that his friend was in peril, but still the idea of a man being so reckless, so full of a devil-may-care sort of spirit, as to be fiddling when pursued by a horde of mortal enemies, was enough to convulse him with mirth.

But he cut short his laughter, and with one leap, sprang up to his seat, seized the reins, let on steam, and dashed swiftly away on the track of friend and foes.

The ground was very level, and allowing the Steam Man free rein, the boy turned in his seat and carefully examined the rifles that were always within reach.

He saw that they were well loaded and in good condition for service.

Then he leaped down from his position to the body of the wagon, and from his store of strange articles, which were placed in a trunk, drew forth a powerful little battery, with numerous connecting wires.

The battery was placed in a secure place, and the wires were strung about the outer framework of the wagon in such a manner that any person placing his hands upon the vehicle would be likely to touch one of the connecting strands.

Then all the wires were placed in the neat binding posts of the battery, and securely screwed down.

Next the liquid lightning was poured from several bottles into earthen cups, and then covered up, with the wires protruding through little holes and the powerful battery was in perfect working order.

"It's always safe to be as well prepared as you possibly can be," soliloquized the young genius, climbing up to his driving seat once more, and resuming the guiding reins. "If any of my enemies try to become too familiar, I shall certainly have to shock their modesty, and perhaps their whole bodies."

The Steam Man was running along at a high rate of speed.

Far away the jolly Irishman was speeding along on the back of the wounded beast, fiddling away like mad.

The Indians were after him at their best pace, their wiry steeds vaulting over the smooth surface on a dead run.

Frank glanced around him and beheld, far off

to the right hand, another band of mounted men, and even at a distance he decided that they were white.

They only numbered four in all, and were galloping toward the Indians.

"They must be the white robbers whom we fought last night," said Frank to himself, as he regarded the party, "and these Indians are their brethren. I am glad that I fixed up my battery. These white men do not stand in fear of my machine."

The white men spurred rapidly towards the Indians, and as they evinced no alarm at their approach, Frank decided that his guess had been the right view of the matter.

A small grove appeared, and Frank slightly reduced his speed as he dashed past it, then he cracked on a full head of steam and the concern went flying over the plains at the rate of fifty miles an hour, the air whistling merrily in the driver's ears.

In a very few seconds the red and white brethren of the plains were overhauled, and jumping down behind the bullet-proof seat the young driver picked up a rifle and began blazing away into the crowded ranks of the flying men.

At the very moment that he fired the first shot, the buffalo tripped and fell heavily to the ground, and away flew Barney Shea through the thin air.

He soon landed, still clinging tightly to the treasure fiddle and bow, and picked himself up in time to see the Steam Man of the Plains crash like a living streak through the broken ranks of his enemies and dash down upon him.

Frank had charged his enemies without fear, for he knew that the red-skins would be too much terrified and surprised to do him harm, and the white men he was willing to run his chances with.

He went rushing through the thunderstruck crowd of mixed red and white men in gallant style, the long legs of the man of mettle making headway through horses and men with ease, sending them flying right and left, and leaving maimed and wounded horses and men scattered far and wide over the plains as he rushed on in his swift course.

The Indians, those who were injured by the charge of the Steam Man, seemed lost in wonder and fear.

It flashed through Frank's mind that his advent had been a surprise.

The thunder of their horses' hoofs upon the prairies prevented the Indians from hearing the mighty tread of the steam giant, and when he made his sudden leap into their very midst, spreading death and destruction through their demoralized ranks, they were at a loss for some time to account for what had taken place.

However, as soon as they had recovered the use of their frightened senses, they turned tail and fled, rushing away as fast as their badly-scared horses could carry them, while their white brethren in vain endeavored to restrain them.

A scared Indian is probably two degrees more obstinate than an army mule.

These fellows listened to no words, but got away lively.

Meantime, the Steam Man was rushing down upon Barney Shea.

The surprised Irishman had been taken aback by his sudden fall and the equally sudden advent of Frank and his machine, and stood fairly in the track of the flying iron feet.

Frank reached for the lever to stop short, but before he could touch it, the Steam Man came down in his pace, ran slowly, and then stopped altogether, not more than five feet from Barney.

Something was the matter.

With a very anxious look on his face, the inventor cast his eyes over the entire machine. As he stood there he could see nothing amiss.

He leaped to the ground.

He hurriedly ran to the giant, expecting to see some of the valuable machinery either broken or out of order.

Such an event would have been a great calamity to the boy.

If anything was broken it could not very easily be replaced, and even to have any of the delicate mechanism twisted would be a serious thing.

"Hold hard!" cried Barney Shea, as Frank examined the Steam Man. "Those devils are coming down like the old Nick upon us."

Frank wheeled.

The white horsemen, four in number, were spurring towards them.

They had their rifles in their hands, and they looked dangerous.

Frank seized one gun, gave another to Barney, and placed himself behind the body of the strong wagon.

"Fire!" he commanded, and two reports rang out.

Frank did not like to take a human life, so he aimed for the shoulder of the foremost rider, and

beheld with satisfaction that the man's arm fell limp and useless to his side.

Barney was not an extraordinary shot with the rifle, although he could handle his neat black-thorn stick with skill. His bullet found quarters in the shoulders of a horse instead of a man, and resulted in the wounded animal wheeling about and galloping madly away.

The others seemed to lose all relish for charging such determined foes as these, and with one accord they wheeled also, and followed their flying comrade.

Frank watched them until their forms grew dim in the distance, and then he turned to the motionless giant.

He resumed his examination of the Steam Man and soon discovered that all parts of the machinery were in perfect order.

Then he examined the boiler, and he instantly discovered the cause of the stoppage.

There was not a drop of water in it!

"Gin slings and powder monkeys!" cried the Irishman, looking into the empty hollow of brass, "how the devil's that, Masther Frank?"

"I'm blest if I know," said the much-puzzled young genius, and then he ran back to the wagon.

He lifted the cover of his water-tank, and was surprised to find that it came up without unlatching, as it should needs have done; he then saw that he had neglected to properly latch the cover, and that the water had all been bounced out while journeying across the plains during the morning.

A pipe running along the shaft connected the two important parts, the boiler and the water-tank, and of course the supply had ceased, and power gave out as soon as the water in the boiler was exhausted.

"What'll ye be after doin'?" asked Barney.

An idea flashed through Frank's brain.

"Do you see that grove?" he asked, pointing to the one he had recently passed by, and which was between a quarter and a half mile distant.

"I do," said Barney.

"Then take this bucket," said Frank, "and be lively as possible in bringing me a pail of water."

"Is there a spring there, I don't know?"

"There may or may not be," said Frank. "But these islands generally have a spring. Hurry, for there's no telling how soon those white men may return in great numbers, and my Steam Man cannot stir a step until he's had a big drink. Lively now."

"I'll be back in a jiffy!" cried the willing chap: and seizing the pail he started for the little island on a slow trot.

"I must be ready to get up steam at shortest noticed," muttered Frank. "I'll have everything in readiness."

He attended to his fire, kept everything up to as great a heat as he dared to, and anxiously awaited Barney's return.

He soon saw him trudging from the grove, and by the manner in which he carried the bucket, Frank knew that he had obtained the water.

The Irishman made good time with his load, and soon handed the precious liquid to Frank, who dumped it into the tank with a great deal of satisfaction.

Barney happened to look away over the great plain and beheld a number of horsemen advancing, distant at the time about a mile.

"Look!" he said.

"I thought so," said Frank, bringing a small telescope to bear on them. "Those white cut-throats are returning reinforced, and if they get here before steam is up we are lost."

He opened the valves of the furnace, and the water heated rapidly.

The horsemen came up swiftly.

"Jump in," said Frank. "Be careful not to touch those wires. Hold your gun in your hands and be ready to die, fighting to the last!"

As the band drew near, the steam began to hiss in the valves; the gauge rose rapidly, and the steam giant lifted one foot from the ground.

On came the outlaws.

Down went the foot; up came the other one in turn, and the giant strode forward, and with rapidly accumulating power his feet rose and fell; just as the band were dashing down upon them, the man of steam bounded off at a tremendous speed, skimming the prairies like a bird on the wing.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BUNTZEN BATTERY.

THE Indians and white men spurred their horses after the Steam Man.

The old fellow was getting ahead like a good one, the rapidly increasing power of the steam being shown by the rapid motion of his long iron limbs.

But the prairie horses are remarkably fleet, and some of them are trained to do and dare almost anything.

Two of these were rushed forward by their riders, white robbers, and the fearless steeds dashed right up to the back of the wagon, so that their breasts came against the wires that were strung around the vehicle.

They dropped lifeless in their tracks.

The wires were connected with a Buntzen Battery—a terrific power, strong enough to kill ten men, with the force of electricity generated by two cells of liquid.

"Worra—worra!" cried Barney Shea, laying down his gun and holding up his hands in astonishment, "that bates the story of the Kilkenny cats."

"It had full power on," said Frank Reade, looking with satisfaction at the wonderful battery. "It would have killed ten horses with one shock."

"What a shocking thing!" said Barney, fairly stumbling into a pun. "Ah, look at the red and white haythins. Come on, ye coppery devils, ye black-hearted white haythins! Come on, and we'll fight the whole fittin' crew o' yer."

Which was probably meant for "Kit and crew," but Barney meant all the same anyhow. What the rollicking son of Erin wanted with the red and white "haythins" was a fight; in fact, that was what he wanted all the time.

If he could have had his choice in these matters, he would probably have preferred fighting with enemies; but the main thing was to get into a rumpus, be it with friend or be it with foe. The idea was that he could be fighting in either case, and that's all he cared about.

But the reds and whites were unable to come up with the prancing monster of the plains, even had they wished to, which was rather doubtful, for they were brought to a sudden standstill by the fate of their comrades.

The manner in which the horses had been struck down was inexplicable to them, and they did not care to pursue this mysterious foe.

"Where are we goin', I don't know," said Barney Shea.

"I'm trying to cut around in a wide half-circle," said Frank; "that will bring us on the track of the herd of wild horses. I'm not going to give Charley up."

"Oh, no—oh, no!" said Barney. "He was a foine lump of a gossoon, so he was."

"He was a good boy," said Frank.

"Do yez moind one thing, and that's not two, be the same token?" said Barney.

"What's that?"

"I'm divilish hungry, so I am."

"So am I," said Frank. "We'll soon get to a grove, and then we'll see if we can't eat our dinner without being interrupted."

The Steam Man was now making splendid time over the level ground.

"You see," said Frank, "I must stop at some grove to fill my tanks with water."

"Ay, nary a bit do I loike cartin' wather in a bucket half a mile, undher such a rale hot sun as this same," said Barney. "Don't yez run short agin, ma bouchal!"

Frank laughed.

"For fear you get killed, I'll reduce the power of the battery," he said, bending down and turning a screw. "Now it will tickle you gently as you take it."

"Ay, loike Scotch snuff," said Barney, and placed his hand on the wires. "Och, howly murder, will I ever get home?"

For the foolish fellow had received a shock that was powerful enough to double him up like a jack-knife.

Frank roared.

"Ow—ow! tare an' ouns, musha musha, my God!" was all poor Barney could say, for although he was very little hurt he was very much frightened, and it was some time before Frank could explain to him the nature of the battery, and the action of its power.

"Oh, yez naid not thry to raison any such nice ideas into me head," said Barney. "I know what the stuff is, ye see. It's nothing more nor less than the devil's whisky ye have in that nate couthrивance. The only thing that's odd is that ye dhrink it through yer fingers. Oh, I can philosophize, and so forth."

Frank was much amused over Barney's comical idea, and gave up the idea of trying to instruct him.

At length the longed-for sight greeted their eyes.

A large grove appeared, and the Steam Man was headed for it.

"I must kape me eyes open when I sit down to play ye a chune this time," said Barney. "It only nades one more of thim cussed buffalors to smash me dear old fiddle and bow, and that would niver do, me boy."

They soon reached the grove, and found that pure water was plentiful.

They put away a very substantial sort of a dinner, and soon took the trail again.

Before them stretched away the broad path of the stampeding army of horses.

On—on, mile after mile gliding from under the tireless feet of the Steam Man.

Suddenly Frank shut off steam, and the iron man came to a halt.

"What would ye be afther?" asked Barney.

"Look at that swath of grass bent down at the side," said Frank, pointing to the track made by the doubly-loaded stallion, when he was forced to run from the herd by the strong hand of Dash Hallett. "At least one of the horses has cut away from the main lot."

"It looks mighty that way," said Barney, with his eyes following the course. "Do yez mane that the cratur wint along in a sort of zig-zag course?"

"Yes, I do," said Frank; "and is it not most likely that the animal may be the one Charley hopped upon?"

Barney scratched his head.

"I'll nae to philosophize a bit on it," he said.

"Well, but what is your advice?"

"Consarnin' what, me gossoon?"

"Why, about the course," said Frank; "which way shall we go?"

"Ye mane whether we shall keep on afther thim wild horses or take the chances to go afther this one?"

"Yes."

"Thin I advise ye to do as ye think best yer-self," said Barney, who did not rate very high in his own opinion. "I can fight loike the cats o' Kilkenny; but may ould Nick fly away wid me if I can name the course."

Frank Reade was really puzzled.

He did not know what to do, for there was nothing, not even the slightest thing, that could turn the balance of opinion one way or the other from the center of doubt.

"He may have kept on with the herd, or he might possibly have turned that leader aside by some means," mused the boy. "I think I'll take the chances and follow the course of the single horse."

He turned to the wagon.

"Have ye decided on the coorse?" asked his companion.

"I have."

"Which one?"

"The single track."

"Faith, I was of the opinion that I'd follow that meself, onyhow," said Barney. "But now that ye—worra—worra, was there iver such an illegant country for fighting? Cast yer eyes forninst yer, ma bouchal!"

As the Irishman spoke, the report of a gun rang out in the distance, and looking around, Frank Reade could see that one man, mounted on horseback, was flying from several Indians, also mounted.

The fugitive was keeping up a running fight with the redskins, and was having a lively time dodging the bullets that were sent to him in return.

Frank jumped into the wagon and seized his powerful telescope.

He hastily adjusted the sight, and brought it to bear upon the single horseman.

A cry pealed from his lips.

"It's Charley!" he shouted. "In with you, Barney, and away to the rescue!"

The shrill whistle sounded forth in piping notes, the long legs shot in and out, and the Steam Man of the Plains dashed off to the rescue.

Charley Gorse was maintaining a very unequal combat, and when he heard the voice of the Steam Man, it sounded like the cheery call of an old friend to his ears.

As the iron monster dashed from the shady grove, the Indians caught sight of the unusual affair.

They had never seen anything in the steam line before, and in all probability would have been fearfully frightened by an ordinary railroad engine, but when their gaze rested upon the iron man of immense stature, who was rushing towards them at such a terrific pace, their wonder and fear were unbounded.

They didn't care about meeting the huge old fellow.

They made up their minds that he was a "bad crowd."

They pulled up so short that they nearly endangered their necks, and the voice of the chieftain hastily stuttered forth a frightened order.

His followers were not long in obeying the command of their leader.

They turned tail and fled at the very top of their horses' speed, not pausing once to see whether they were pursued or not; and when the Steam Man halted at the spot where Charley was stand-

ing, there was no one to battle with, and Frank Reade allowed the old fellow to utter a prolonged whistle of triumph.

In a moment the two boys were shaking hands heartily, for in their own minds the cousins had doubted that they would ever meet again.

"We must not stop here," said Charley. "There are two men in danger; they are among the Osages. Drive fast, as I direct, for at sunset they die!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE LOVELY WIDOW SHOFFUSGUY.

THE lovely Widow Shoffusguy stood firm and steadfast on her guard as the two other squaws rushed upon her.

She was a screamer of the very first water, and she didn't propose to back down even against numbers.

She held her neat toothpick firmly in her right hand.

Her left arm had a sort of padded mantle wrapped around it, and this arm she held across her breast as though designing to use it as a shield.

Two squaws closed in upon her.

The lovely Widow Shoffusguy had a pair of eyes that were useful as well as extremely ornamental.

She contrived to see both blows aimed at her by her foes.

The nearest one she blocked with her beaded shield, the knife turning off from the beads and shells as quickly as upon a plate of steel.

The other squaw was a little behind her ally, and the lovely Widow Shoffusguy very promptly kicked at her.

It was not remarkable for elegance, this kick; it was not gaudy, but fitted in an extremely neat manner, for it was planted in the stomach of the on-coming squaw, and the latter soon after conceived the idea that the ground had jumped up and struck her on the back of the head.

Then the lovely Widow Shoffusguy turned her undivided attention to the other lady.

The latter had to depend solely upon her own resources now, for she could expect no help from her friend until the latter was refilled with wind.

Poor George Augustus Fitznoodle stood hard by, looking with unbounded astonishment upon this strange scene.

The idea of these women fighting was new to his civilized mind; he had heard of such doings in Africa, but he did not know that America had Amazons.

It was scarcely of material interest to him which way the battle terminated, for the idea had impressed itself upon his mind that the result would be that he was to wed one of these copper-colored fire-eaters, or else burn at the stake.

"H'and h'I prefer matrimony to cremation," said Fitznoodle, watching the battle between the two women, and at length coming to the conclusion that he preferred the lovely Widow Shoffusguy to the others, on account of her beauty.

She proved a perfect screamer, and got in the first cut at her foe.

The latter became more wary.

Motzer-Ponum and his braves stood by, and murmured approvingly when an extra fine thrust or parry was made.

The lovely one was equal to a Fourth ward rough.

She was a stabber, and she was a biter, and she dearly loved to gouge.

She put in a sudden left-handed blow of her fist, knocked her enemy just a trifle off of her balance, and then she clipped at her three times with her knife in less than four seconds.

Down went the enemy.

In a trice the lovely Widow Shoffusguy had her by the throat.

She shouted out something that was as good as Greek to Fitznoodle's ears.

"She's probably calling h'on 'er h'enemy to yield, quarter or no quarter," said Fitznoodle to himself, and he was about right.

The prostrate woman muttered something in a half-choked voice, and was immediately released.

As she got upon her feet, the other squaw—the one who had been knocked breathless by the foot of the lovely Widow Shoffusguy—regained her breath and her feet, and made a desperate charge upon the latter.

"Eavens! 'ow very disgraceful h'all this h'is, to be sure," muttered the scandalized George Augustus. "H'I wonder h'if they really 'ope to be called respectable members h'of society h'if they go h'on h'at this rate? Why, in h'all my life h'I've never 'eard h'anything so scandalous. H'I really 'ope this good-looking one may be victorious, for, from my soul, the h'other's the most vicious-looking wretch h'I've h'ever met."

He regarded the lovely widow approvingly as she struck an attitude of defiance, and of defense also, and met her foe with fearless mien.

The latter struck quick and sharp, a perfect shower of blows, but they were all cleverly caught on the beaded shield.

The plucky Widow Shoffusguy waited for a good chance, and then she slashed her opponent across the face.

Then she kicked, and punched, and stabbed her all at one time, much after the Bowery boys' plan.

Down went the enemy.

The widow mounted her in less than three quivers of an eyelash.

The same ceremony was gone through with her as with the previous conquered foe, and then the victor stood erect.

She cast her flaming eyes about her, and they rested upon the form of George Augustus Fitznoodle.

She swooped down upon him.

Fitznoodle wilted.

She grasped him by the hair and lifted her knife on high.

Fitznoodle bellowed:

"For 'Eaven's sake, go h'easy!" he cried, expecting every moment to feel the keen point of the flashing blade in his heart. "H'I'm prepared to fulfill h'all my h'engagements. Don't strike; h'I'm not h'insured."

But she didn't have any intention of killing the prize she had fought for; she only wanted to place her hands upon him, declare him to be her property by the act, and to defy all other claimants or disputants by virtue of her brandished blade.

But she was too much of a tearer for any one else to trouble her, and not a voice was upraised against her mere proclamation of possession.

"You mine now!" she said, looking down with softened gaze upon the countenance of the somewhat reassured Fitznoodle; "you b'long Shoffusguy, and me take you to wigwam. You come?"

"With the greatest pleasure h'imaginable," said George Augustus, with the expression of a man who is about to swallow a dose of jalap. "H'I'm h'always h'at the command of the fair sex."

And then the lovely Widow Shoffusguy lost no time in yanking him off to her wigwam.

An hour or so later the Indian population was aroused by loud yells from without the village, announcing the approach of some of their tribe, and also denoting the fact that a number of prisoners were being brought in by the returning warriors.

But to explain how all this came about, the author must leave the Indian village and take up another thread in the warp of the story.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NIGHT PISTOL—THE CAPTURE—THE ESCAPE.

THE reader will remember that in a previous chapter the horse that bore Dash Hallett and Charley Gorse stopped so suddenly as to cast both his riders to the ground.

Charley was half stunned, for his head was not quite so hard as the flinty surface it had come in contact with, and he lay perfectly motionless for a moment.

Dash Hallett had kept hold of the flowing mane of the stallion, to which he now clung with a desperate grip.

It was so pitchy dark that one could scarce have seen ten feet ahead.

The stallion was shivering from head to foot with some great fear, and had not the hunter gripped him firmly by the nostrils, the steed would have dashed away.

Dash Hallett was a man of experience in such a matter as this, and he knew that there must be sufficient cause for the great evident alarm of the stallion.

He looked for Charley.

The latter got up from the ground with his hand to his head.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Dash. "There's some good cause for the critter gettin' scared so precious bad. I'll hold on to him while you walk on—don't move too quick—try and find out the cause."

Charley placed his hand to his pocket and pulled forth a six-barreled revolver of splendid make, and holding this firmly in his hand, walked slowly and carefully ahead.

It was well that he did go out slowly, else he might have met a horrible fate.

He had advanced about ten steps.

Then he saw that he stood on the very edge of a chasm.

He peered out into the gloom, and fancied he

could see an indistinct mass lying before him, occupying the space that should have been taken up by thin air.

While he was looking at this in a puzzled sort of manner, he caught sight of what appeared to be two points of flame.

These points of flame were on the top of the indistinct mass.

Charley regarded them earnestly.

They glowed and flashed like brilliant stars, and Charley muttered:

"That must be some animal."

All doubt was driven from his mind by the growl which came in a low rumble to his ears.

"A bear!" muttered Charley, and having only a pistol he turned tail and walked back to Dash.

"Didn't I hear a growl?" asked the latter.

"Yes," said Charley, and then told all that he had seen.

"A chasm?" said Dash.

"Yes."

"And looks like it might be kinder choked up with somethin'?"

"Yes."

"Then I know where we are," said Dash, unslung his rifle. "It's the place where I leaped my poor hoss across to-day, and them's the bodies of the buffers what's layin' there. Of course that's a big bear feeding on the bodies."

"What'll you do?" asked Charley.

"Leave you to hold the hoss while I go forrard and plum him between the eyes," said Hallett, with the instinct of a genuine hunter. "He is too cussid dangerous to live, and he might follow on our track if I didn't settle him."

"Go ahead," said Charley. "But how'll you see?"

"Aim at his sparklin' peepers."

"And if you only wound him?"

"Then there'll be the devil to pay."

"Then you can depend on me to help you out of the scrape," said the boy.

"How?"

"With this pistol."

He held up the weapon.

Hallett laughed.

"That popgun?"

"Yes."

"Why," said Dash, "the bar himself would laugh at yer."

"You don't understand the true properties of the article," said Charley. "It's just as deadly as your rifle, carries a bullet nearly as large, and is made for shooting at night."

"What in thunder do you mean?"

"Never mind now," said Charley. "You try your best, and if you miss him the bear is mine!"

Wondering much at Charley's mysterious talk, the hunter crept away from him, holding his loaded rifle in his hands.

As he approached the edge of the chasm he paused, for he had caught sight of the monster's flaming orbs.

He carefully drew back the hammer.

The bear growled.

Hallett sank on one knee, thus bringing his eyes very nearly on a level with those of his enemy, and affording him a chance for a surer shot.

The bear moved as though aware that he was in peril.

Dash Hallett waited patiently.

The beast began to growl and sway about, thus preventing the hunter from aiming at his eyes.

But he soon stood still again.

This was his chance, and Dash drew his gun to his shoulder.

His eyes glanced rapidly over the sights, and he looked fairly between the glowing orbs of the beast.

He pulled the trigger.

Crack!

The gun sent forth a frightfully spiteful note, and almost immediately after the sound came a deep and ferocious growl of rage and pain.

He had only wounded the monster, and the bear made for him with long, bounding leaps.

It didn't take Dash Hallett an hour to get away from the edge of the chasm.

"He's after me!" he yelled to Charley, as the huge monster came prancing after him across the high heap of dead buffaloes. "Give him a dose!"

Charley released the horse, and the stallion immediately scampered away.

Charley drew the night pistol from his belt as Dash reach him.

It was too dark to see the bear, but they could hear him, and that was all that Charley needed.

He raised the revolver, and pointed the muzzle toward the chasm.

He pulled the trigger.

There came an ordinary report, and from the mouth of the revolver leaped forth a brilliant ball of fire.

The flaming sphere rushed swiftly through the air.

It spread a bright blue glare far around its course.

Charley still held the pistol extended in hand, his finger still resting against the trigger.

The bright blue dart careened above the awful chasm.

The bear—a gaunt, hideous monster—could now be plainly seen.

The pistol was lowered a little, the boy's flashing eyes ran over the sights, and his steady forefinger again pressed the steel keynote of death.

Again there came the report, but this time a bullet must have sped from the mouth of the weapon, for the bear, by the expiring light of the fiery ball, could be seen to totter and fall.

But he was not dead, only wounded worse than ever, and consequently more full of spite than before.

He was on his feet again, as they could tell by the sound.

"Gin it to him agin, younker," said the much-pleased Hallett. "Fire away!"

Charley obeyed.

Another ball of flame issued from the new idea, and while it lit up the scene the boy fired again and sent another bullet into the body of the brute.

The monster still advanced upon them.

There is no animal, the legendary nine-lived cat always excepted, so hard to kill as the American bear. It will stand forty bullets in its body, and still make a desperate and tenacious fight until the heart or brain is pierced, and then the battle ends.

As the monster rushed over the heap of dead buffaloes toward the two hunters, these latter detected a suspicious sound ringing out.

It was the steady pit-pat of horses' feet, not a great number, but certainly many, and they thought for a moment that the herd of wild horses had turned back.

But they were quickly undeceived.

A loud yell rang out with chilling distinctness.

"Indians!" cried Dash.

"And they've discovered us!" cried Charley.

"Yer night pistol done that," said Hallett.

"Here they come like the devil, and here comes the bear too."

A very nice visitation truly.

The Indians pouring down upon them from one side, and a furious bear from the other; a chasm yawning across their path, and dark night surrounding them.

A light flared up in the air and the glare of a dozen torches lit up the gloom of the surroundings.

The Indians, torches in hand, spurred down toward the whites, and the bear retreated from the blinding glare, hastily scrambling across the closed-up chasm and disappearing on the other side.

Dash Hallett gripped his rifle. Charley Gorse fingered his pistol.

But the old hunter knew that there was no present way out of the scrape.

"It's no use, younker," he said, allowing his rifle to fall to the ground. "We can't wallop 'em and we can't run away from 'em, so they must have their own way."

"I'd rather fight," said Charley, but with a cautious idea he thrust the night pistol into his boot, in the hope that he might be able to make use of it.

The Indians surrounded them, and their flaming torches lit up their severe faces with terrible effect.

"You prisoner," said the leader, jumping down from his horse and placing his hands on Hallett's shoulders.

"I s'pose yer about right," said Dash.

He was one of those cool fellows who take everything easy, for he held that he wasn't going to die until his time came, and then there would be no help for him.

So he delivered himself with the resignation of a brave man to his foes.

Together with Charley he was bound to one of the spare horses with which the Osages were supplied.

Then the leader remounted his horse and the party dashed away in the darkness, for the torches were extinguished.

The pursuers were directly in the center of the party of reds, so there was but very little chance of their escaping from their vigilant captors.

On—on, mile after mile they dashed, their fleet prairie horses keeping up a long and steady gallop with the endurance exhibited only by the wild steeds of the plains.

In the course of time the Indian village was reached, the approach of the party being heralded by the yelling Osages in the style which has already been described.

The entire population, the lovely little widow Shoffusguy and her newly-made husband in-

cluded, turned out to greet the victorious incoming men.

When George Augustus Fitznoodle beheld his friend and guide he rushed forward to greet him; but his lovely spouse took him by the ear and made him stand aside.

"You here?" cried Dash.

"H'I h'am!" emphatically replied the newly-fledged bridegroom. "H'I h'am 'ere, h'and h'it seems h'I h'am to stay 'ere for some time. H'in fact, h'I 'ave married this lovely piece h'of black walnut; 'er name h'is Shoffusguy, h'and h'I 'ave been forced to build a fire for 'er h'already. H'I can't say h'I h'am h'extremely delighted with the joys h'of wedded bliss; but h'it was cremation h'or connubial bliss, h'and, h'in the h'extremity, I chose the bliss."

In spite of his captivity, Charley Gorse was so much tickled, that he roared outright, and a comical smile flashed over Hallett's weather-beaten visage as he listened to the Cockney's discourse.

"The mare's the best hoss in your ranche, old boy, is she?"

"You've 'it h'it," said George Augustus.

The Indians had taken the prisoners from the horse, and placed them in a sitting posture on the ground.

Several orders were issued and young men hurried about.

In less than ten minutes a huge blazing fire had been kindled in front of the principal wigwam.

The chiefs and braves then squatted down in a large circle around this roaring and blazing fire, although the heat and summer's night warmth rendered their seats very uncomfortable.

"What are they up to?" asked Charley.

"I guess they're going to have a big pow-wow over us," said Dash.

"To decide our fate?"

"Exactly."

"What do you suppose it'll be?"

"Burnin' at the stake," replied the indifferent Hallett, "with p'raps a bit o' gauntlet runnin' thrown in just to vary the monotony of the darned thing."

"That's pleasant," said Charley.

"Very," said Hallett. "It wouldn't be anything if a chap could only get used to it, but the deuce of it is that just as a fellow begins to be familiar with it—he dies."

Charley Gorse could not but look with the deepest admiration upon this man, who could laugh and crack his eccentric jokes while his worst enemies were deciding his fate.

Charley was brave, recklessly so, but he could not look death in the face and laugh at the grim monster.

A solemn hush fell upon the assembly as the high and mighty Motzer-Ponum, the grand chieftain of the tribe, arose with his light blanket around him, puffed a few mouthfuls of smoke from a calumet he held in his hand, and then, after blowing the smoke to the four points of the compass, handed it to the chieftain next in rank.

This was the council pipe.

It went around the circle in very solemn style, and then the mighty Motzer-Ponum arose to address his followers.

While he was speaking Charley heard Dash Hallett mutter:

"That settles it."

"Can you understand him?" asked the boy.

"Perfectly."

"And what does he say?"

"Oh, he knows I popped over some of his men to-day, and he recommends burnin' me at sunset to-morrer."

"And me?"

"They'll burn you at the same time."

"If they keep me they will," muttered the boy, and made up his mind to bear any pain and face any peril that would aid him in making his escape.

Soon after, the council broke up, and one of the chiefs, in broken English, informed them of their fate, and then the prisoners were separated.

Hallett being much feared, was securely bound and placed in the council-house, where he was guarded by two braves, one outside and one within.

Charley being a boy, they did not look upon him as very dangerous, and one of the chiefs was assigned as his keeper.

He took the boy by the arm, and led him off to his wigwam.

He bound Charley's hands behind his back, and threw him on the floor, and then placed himself upon a pile of dry skins, and was soon snoring.

Charley tugged at his bonds.

They were made of buffalo hide, and were securely tied.

His efforts to free himself would have been in vain had it not been for the fact that a big wooden pail, filled with water, stood near at hand, and into this water Charley managed to submerge his wrists.

Every little while he would tug at them, but

they were tough, and took a long time to get softened, and it was early dawn before he was enabled to stretch them apart and free his hands; but at length they yielded.

With great caution the boy secured the rifle and powder-flask of the sleeping chief, and with the determination to do or die, opened the door.

He saw one of the horses grazing near at hand, with a rope halter hanging from its head, and, like a flash, Charley mounted the steed and was off.

Instantly the alarm was sounded, and soon his pursuers were after him; but Charley had got the start and he kept it.

He had thrown his pursuers off the track once, and they had discovered him again while he was resting in a grove, but he was up and away before they reached him.

For miles he had maintained a running fight with them, and might have gone under had not Barney and Frank, together with the terrifying steam man, arrived to save him from his foes.

He allowed his horse to scamper off, while he and Frank mounted the seat, and while flying along, made out their plan of rescue.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRANK READE'S GENIUS.

THE summer sun was slowly sinking behind the western hills.

The Osage tribe, in a holiday sort of attire—that is to say, they had on extra feathers, etc.—gathered in solemn silence in their village.

The hour had arrived when, according to their deliberate decision, the white prisoner was to die.

The chieftains, prominent among them the great and mighty chieftain Motzer-Ponum, sat in a large circle around the wide-spreading roots of an old tree.

This tree was to be the stake at which the white man was to perish.

An order was given.

"Let Schorumanollus and Schlenterer, our two most trusted braves, bring before us the white man, while others bring the dry brush wood," cried out Motzer-Ponum.

The two chosen braves departed on their mission, and several of the younger warriors hastened to procure the wood, and heap it upon one side of the tree.

By the time that the fuel was collected, the two braves returned to the tree, conducting the bound form of Dash Hallett.

The prisoner was a little pale, but otherwise he was the same devil-may-care rover of the plains.

He glanced scornfully upon the chieftains, and cried out to them, in their tongue:

"Let me at liberty, and give me but a single weapon—a knife—and I'll fight six of your best warriors."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Motzer-Ponum. "And in that way you would cheat us out of our coveted pleasure. Oh, no; you shall burn!"

"Bah!" cried Dash, who hoped that they might be taunted sufficiently to dispatch him with their weapons, whereby he would escape the agony of the fire. "You are a set of squaws. I have killed dozens of your bravest men, and some of them died like a pappoose might die—crying for mercy and begging for their life. I have cut their hearts out, and they were not like those of men. They were deer's hearts, and some of them were even blacker than those of the prairie dogs."

Several of the braves and warriors set up an angry yell at these taunts, but the shrewd Motzer-Ponum prevented them from using violence to the prisoner.

"Do you not see that the white man wishes to arouse your anger?" he asks. "If you kill him with your hands, then he escapes the torture of the fire."

They saw through the dodge then, and fell back in silence.

The wood was now brought forward, and Dash was securely bound to the tree.

The dry brush was piled up around him as high as his breast.

Then the warriors drew knives and tomahawks and, at a signal from Motzer-Ponum, began their weird war-dance, the chosen braves Schorumanollus and Schlenterer, leading the fantastic measure.

When the preliminary dance was ended, the chief called for the fire-brand, and one of the widowed squaws—not the lovely widow Shoffus-guy, however—advanced to the tree with a blazing torch.

"It's good-bye with this chap now," soliloquized the hunter. "Well, I never done anything worse nor puttin' a few red cusses under the ground, and I don't think that counts again me. I wonder how long a fellow feels the fire?"

"Let the torch be applied," commanded the

chieftain; but the words were hardly out of his mouth before several of the tribe set up a cry and pointed toward the western plains.

The widow paused with uplifted torch, and then allowed the blazing brand to fall to the ground.

Alone, and apparently unarmed, Frank Reade was advancing towards the tree.

Of course the Osages did not feel much alarmed by the advent of a single boy amid their armed numbers, but they were certainly a good deal surprised.

Not so much, however, as they were destined to be before our hero got through with them.

The brave young traveler advanced straight to the group of chiefs and braves, cast one glance at the surprised prisoner, and then gravely saluted the terrible Motzer-Ponum.

The latter, his vanity much tickled by the profundity of Frank's salaam, bowed low in return. Frank then spoke to Dash Hallett.

"You understand the jargon used by these Osages?"

"I do."

"Then act as my interpreter," said the boy, "and if we fail to pull the wool over their eyes, then call me a fool."

"Fire away," said Dash.

"Tell them that I'm some mighty medicine-man or other," said Frank: "you know best what to say."

"Chieftains, listen," cried Dash. "This young brave, the son of the moon, the grandchild of the sun, and the mother-in-law of all the stars, is the greatest medicine-man known to the world, and he now desires to prove to you that the Great Spirit is frowning upon your tribe."

Of course the red-skins were properly impressed by the string of high-sounding titles given to our hero by the easy-spoken Dash.

Who wouldn't be?

"Have you told 'em?" asked Frank.

"I have."

"Tell them I have been sent to them by command of the Great Spirit."

"What for?"

"To rescue you."

"All right," said Dash, and in sound Osage informed the Indians of the very important fact.

"He must prove his title," said the chief.

"He will do so," said Dash.

"How?"

The hunter turned to Frank.

"They want to know how you are going to prove what I've been blowing about?"

"Oh!" said Frank. "Well, in the first place I shall let a knife drive fair and square at your breast. It's a trick knife, so don't allow the act to frighten you. After I hurl the blade at you, I'll make it stick fast in that tree."

"If you can do that, you'll make the reds open their peepers," said Dash.

"That's what I'm here for, said Frank, "You don't know me yet."

The hunter then spoke to the Indians.

"This great and mighty relative of the sun and moon and the little stars," said the trapper, "will throw a knife at my heart with all his strength. He will cast a spell over the knife, and it will not hurt me in the least. He will take the weapon and hurl it at this tree, and the blade will sink into the bark."

A murmur of applause greeted this piece of intelligence, and the Osages looked expectantly at Frank.

The boy drew a short, heavy dirk-knife from his breast, taking great care not to touch any of the numerous wires which crossed his body.

He held the dirk aloft.

The dying sunlight glanced along the blade, and then the young genius planted his right foot firmly, balanced his knife on the palm of his left hand, point reversed, and hurled it at Dash Hallett's breast.

The blade flew swiftly through the air.

The point struck full at the broad breast of the undaunted Dash, rebounded from his bosom, and fell with a cheery ring to the ground.

The Indians didn't say anything, but they looked their wonder.

Frank stepped forward, picked up the knife, planted his foot firmly, and then hurled the dirk at the huge tree.

The point sank into the bark and wood, and the shaft quivered like an aspen.

Then the redskins did shout.

They sent up a mighty yell of unbounded delight, mixed with a little superstitious awe, and regarded our hero very much.

Frank pulled the knife from the tree, walked up to the chief, and took the latter's hand in his own.

He lifted the blade and struck a slight blow at Motzer-Ponum's bare arm.

The point pierced the flesh, and a tiny stream of blood trickled forth.

The chief did not murmur, but regarded the boy wondering.

Frank then put the dirk in the leader's huge paw.

"Tell him to strike lightly, as I struck him," he said to Dash.

The latter communicated the desire to Motzer-Ponum.

CHAPTER XV.

MOWSHER ABINER.

"I SHALL do so," said Motzer-Ponum.

He held Frank's hand in his own, and struck lightly at the boy's bared arm.

Another tiny stream of blood followed the blow and Motzer-Ponum seemed triumphant over the fact.

Frank stepped back a dozen paces.

"Now tell him to hurl it at my heart," he said to Dash.

The latter obeyed.

The chieftain, in common with many of his tribe, was an expert knife-thrower, and when Dash shouted out the command of the boy-genius, the redskin leaped to his feet and hurled the knife with rapid aim.

The flying knife spun over in the air, and the point struck fairly against the breast of the unwavering Frank.

Then it rebounded and fell to the ground with a musical clang, while the boy stood smiling and unharmed.

We were going to say that Motzer-Ponum turned pale; but an Indian don't turn pale under extreme terror.

But he did get sickly-green-looking around the gills, and stood regarding the youthful medicine-man with wonder and fear, while the warriors and braves sent up a shout that testified their approval.

"That's darned clever, youngster," approvingly remarked Dash Hallett. "You're a team and a hoss to let; no mistake about that. Can you do anything more?"

"If it is needed, I can," said the boy; "but I think I've done all that is necessary. Who is this coon?"

An Indian of middle age, having a very odd sort of head-dress, and covered from head to foot with rattles of snakes, bones of animals and various other charms, was approaching the group.

"That," said Mr. Dash Hallett, with a comical grin, "is a brother of yours."

"How?"

"He deals in magic."

"Oh, ho!" cried Frank.

"Keep your eye skinned, my boy, for he's goin' to dispute yer."

"I'm not afraid of him."

"But he can do things you can't begin to make out."

"I can return the compliment," said Frank, "and beat him, too."

"Don't make any mistakes," said Dash.

"I'll not," said Frank. "Fear not but that I will save your life."

"I hope so," said the cool card, as though Frank were speaking of a very small matter.

"What is his name?" asked Frank.

"T'other medicine chap?"

"Yes."

"Mowsher Abiner."

"Mowsher Abiner?"

"That's it."

"What does it mean?"

"The devil himself," said Hallett. "This chap is the greatest medicine-man on the plains to-day, and there's mischief in his eye now, so keep cool and knock him silly if you can."

Mowsher Abiner now approached the boy and gave him a keen glance.

"I may as well keep on good terms with him if I can," said Frank. "Please present my compliments to him."

"Most mighty Mowsher Abiner," roared out the prisoner, "this great and illustrious relative of the sun, moon, and stars greets you."

Mowsher Abiner acknowledged the greeting by a profound bow.

"I am pleased to meet my young brother of the art," he replied. "What wants he of the tribe of Motzer-Ponum?"

"My liberty."

"And wherefore?"

"Because the Great Spirit is angry."

"Has been sent by the Great Spirit?"

"He has."

"Is he a great medicine?"

"The greatest in the world!" confidently asserted Hallett.

"Greater than Mowsher Abiner?" demanded the coppersy trickster.

"Even so," said Dash.

"I would be pleased to witness a portion of his superiority."

The Osage medicine-man evidently regarded our hero with some contempt.

"He wants a sample of your power," said the hunter to Frank.

"Tell him I will now salute him as the male descendants of the sun, moon, and stars salute each other," said the humorous genius, to whom Hallett had made known the high-sounding titles bestowed upon him. "Also say that I shall expect him to return the salutation in the same manner."

Dash called this out to the Indian medicine.

The old man bowed.

Frank walked up to him, nodded with great gravity to the north, south, east, and west, and then seized Mowsher Abiner's body with his two hands, and forcibly spun the medicine-man around three times.

When he was released, the Indian fraud nodded similarly in front of the white fraud, and then placed his hands upon the boy's body, as Frank had done with him.

Here, however, the imitation came to a sudden end.

As soon as he touched Frank's body, the great and mighty Mowsher Abiner yelled out like a bull, and leaped four or five feet straight up into the air.

He came down with a thump.

The braves and chieftains could not restrain their mirth.

Even old Motzer-Ponum himself, although he tried to look dignified and grave, grinned all over his broad face.

The medicine-man was mad.

He was ripping mad.

He was a great sight more mad than he was frightened or hurt, and as the laughter of the much-tickled Indians rang tauntingly in his ears he leaped to his feet and drew a long knife from beneath a sort of pocket which adorned his loins.

With blazing eyes he leaped upon the brave boy.

Frank, firm and undaunted, stood directly in his path.

Not a muscle quivered as he faced his wrathful enemy.

The keen knife was lifted on high, and was then driven straight at the very heart of the young magician.

The silence of death enthralled the lookers-on.

The point came steadily down against the young breast, as Frank Reade stood with his right foot firmly planted.

He reeled slightly as the blade struck him, and then stood firm again, while the enraged Mowsher Abiner rolled headlong to the hard earth, the hilt of the knife still clenched in his strong fingers.

The blade of the knife was unstained, and the boy stood unharmed, looking down upon his prostrate rival with mild contempt.

"By thunder!" grasped Hallett, drawing a long breath, "I thought we was both of us gone that time."

"Didn't I say that I could beat the very devil himself?" smiled Frank.

"I reckon as how you make out to do it," grinned the hunter.

Mowsher Abiner now picked himself up from the ground.

Frank was ready for him again, but he had nothing to fear.

Mowsher Abiner was a sadder and much wiser man, and with servile tread he crept up to the boy's feet and bowed his decorated head in token of submission.

"He's knuckled under!" cried Dash.

"Does he give in beaten?" cried Frank.

"Clean gone," said Hallett.

"Then bid him depart to his wigwam."

Dash complied, and the quashed dealer in magic slunk away.

"Now tell them anything awful that you can crack up in order to make them cut you free," said Frank.

"Heaven!" roared Dash Hallett. "This mighty medicine-man commands you to release me at once, or he will cause the Great Spirit to hurl down a mountain of fire upon your village."

That settled it.

In less than a minute the brushwood was scattered, and the knife of the chieftain cut the prisoner's bonds.

"Follow a few feet behind me!" commanded the boy, and at a leisurely pace walked off to the west.

Two minutes later a loud chorus of cries rang out, mingled with commands, and a large body of white and red horsemen galloped into the village from the east.

"Double quick, younker," called out Hallett to the boy. "There's danger behind."

"Then cut like thunder," cried Frank, and at good speed he dashed ahead towards the grove at the west, Dash following.

There was danger behind!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DESERTER.

It must not be supposed that the band of red and white brigands are to be dropped from the story.

Other events have crowded them out for a while, but we now come upon them again.

Some ten miles to the north of the place where the emigrant train was first attacked by these fiends, we come across the stronghold of the band.

A low range of hills spring up from beside a brawling stream.

These hills, long, low and rocky, are full of hidden passes and chasms, intersected with many cunningly concealed paths.

A few hundred yards up from the bank of the noisy stream, a pathway, guarded by a tall sentinel, conducts us to an open glade on a rocky plateau.

This plateau, some fifty feet wide, and fully a hundred feet long, is dotted with numerous roughly built huts of hewn logs, the cracks and spaces filled with mud and bark, and square holes filled with daylight serving for windows.

A stunted tree, low and broad spread, covers part of the little rocky plain, and beneath the far-reaching branches reclines Captain Slasher, the leader of the ruthless band of cut-throats, banded together under the name of "The Brethren of the Plains."

He was a splendid looking fellow, this terrible Captain Slasher, and looked as though he had been a gentleman in his time. He was tall and broad shouldered, with flashing, devil-may-care black eyes, and a general expression of boldness. He really was as fearless a freebooter as ever rode the plains.

Around him sat or reclined numerous members of the mixed band—red and white.

Sholum Alarkum, the head chief of the treacherous Sioux, who had combined with the white men for murder and plunder, and Tolahferrer, the second chief, were seated near the white captain, also indulging in the weed. Some men could also be seen in the huts, busy at cooking.

Previous to their terrific battle with the sturdy emigrants, the robbers had numbered over a hundred strong. Now they did not muster more than perhaps two-thirds that number, and not a few of these were wounded.

The brave pioneers had struck boldly and well in defense of their rights and their loved ones, and bandaged limbs bore evidence to their desperate resistance.

"I say, chief," said Captain Slasher, turning to his brother devil, "we must recruit our band in some manner."

"Why?"

"We are not strong enough to attack a decent sized party on the plains, unless we could take them by surprise."

"That's the way," coolly said the savage, who, along with his followers, had learned to speak good English while with the white men. "You must always wait for darkness; you ought never to strike until an hour before dawn. Then they sleep hard, like dead, and you can kill men and women without taking a blow in return."

"Poh!" disgustedly cried the other, turning up his nose in contempt at the red rascal's plan. "I could not fight that way. In fact, it is not fighting at all, I like to face my foe, weapon in hand, and strike blow for blow, send back shot for shot; but to stab in the dark—bah!"

"It's a safe way," remarked Sholum Alarkum. "Yes," said the outlaw captain, "and it's quite as well—"

The sentence ended abruptly.

A peculiar call came echoing up the rock-formed pathway that led from the bank of the stream to the stronghold.

The two leaders looked at each other.

"That's Mutseer," said the captain.

"Yes," said the chief, and he's bringing in a prisoner."

"Who the deuce can he have chanced upon?" was the mental query of the captain.

In a moment ringing footsteps were heard upon the rock pathway.

The bloodthirsty Mutseer, one of the most cruel and unconscionable dogs in his whole vile race, came up the path, leading a strapping white man by the arm.

"Ho—ho!" cried Captain Slasher fixing his piercing eyes upon the face of the tall white prisoner. "I think I have seen this man before."

"Where?" demanded Sholum Alarkum.

"With the emigrant train," said the other.

"He fought well then."

Mutseer now came forward and placed the prisoner before the two leaders.

"A prize for you, captain," he said. "I got him down by the stream."

"It's a wonder he didn't get you," said the captain, smiling, as he noted the tall form and broad shoulders of the man.

"You don't get Mutseer so easy," proudly said the Indian.

"Well, my man," said the captain, speaking to the prisoner, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Much," said the fellow.

"Speak!" commanded the captain.

"I suppose you remember me?" grinned the other.

"Rather," dryly said the captain, removing his cap and disclosing a black and blue mark on his head. "I think I owe you for this beauty spot."

"I guess you're about right," said the man, with a broader grin. "I struck against you then, and now I've come to say to you that I'll strike for you."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say."

"Have you deserted from the train?"

"I have."

"To join us?"

"That's the idea."

"Do you mean it?"

"I reckon you ain't about the best man in the world to joke with about such a matter," said the prisoner.

"Right," said Captain Slasher. "Your head is on straight. But what is your motive in doing this?"

"The same motive that moves the world," said the other. "Money."

"Go on," said the captain, "I'm listening."

"Well, you see," began the fellow, "I drove one of the teams from the place where the train started, and I happened to find out that one of the regular express wagons that cross the plains under a strong guard was not ready to go out, and that the agent of that big firm—what do you call 'em?"

"Wells, Fargo & Co.?" put in the captain.

"That's it, Wells, Fargo & Co., put aboard a lot of money in one of the strong boxes they use. They had an idea that old Carter could take the money through just as safe as their express could, and I was one of the men that helped to stow the specie in a wagon."

"I am getting interested," said the captain.

"I thought I could wake you up," grinned the teamster. "Well, I didn't like my work nor the way I was being tossed, and I thought I should like to have a whack at this pile of money. I heard Snap Carter talking 'bout your hiding-place, and so I had no trouble in finding you. That's all I've got to say. You know by experience that I am no slouch, and therefore you needn't be afraid to admit me in your band."

"Have you ever been a rover before?" asked Captain Slasher.

"Well, to tell you the truth," proudly admitted the teamster, "I have been a burglar in my time. I tried honesty, and it don't seem to agree with me. I can't sleep well nights. So I've made up my mind to try the old life again. The devil and I seemed to get along very well together, and I think I'll resume work for my old master."

Captain Slasher peered closely into the fellow's eyes, and then bestowed a smile of approval upon him.

"I like your style," he said. "I think that we shall get along together first rate, and if we improve upon acquaintance I'll soon raise you."

"Then I may consider myself a member of the band?"

"You may," said Captain Slasher. "We have two mottoes: one, 'Die for our Brethren,' and the other, 'Death to Traitors.' Beside that, we have passwords and signs which you will learn, but, as you value your life, remember our two mottoes. When our band is once entered, there is no such thing as leaving it again; and should you desert us, the most horrible torture, the most terrible death that man, white or red, can devise, shall be your doom!"

"I shall stay as long as I am treated in a half-decent manner," said the teamster. "I mean business with you, not treachery, so I have nothing to fear."

Very nearly all the men in the band were now collected in a large circle around the speakers, listening to the conversation.

"You are sure that you are dealing fair with me?" demanded the captain.

"Of course I am."

"And that you come as a friend?"

"Certainly," said the other, looking wonderingly at the speaker. "I have told you nothing but the truth."

"Lair!" cried the captain, his eyes blazing like

coals of fire. "You are speaking with a double tongue, and your treachery is well known to me. Take him, my brave boys! Seize the traitor! tie him up to this tree, and I'll send six bullets through his black heart!"

The order was instantly obeyed.

Even had the teamster been disposed to fight with his enemies, it would have been worse than useless to have lifted a hand in self-defense.

He was seized by a score of hands, thrown to the ground, securely bound, and was then tied to the tree.

All this had taken place in the space of about two minutes, and before the deserter could fairly comprehend what had happened to him, he was tied securely to the trunk of the tree, a host of threatening-looking faces surrounding him, and the reckless leader of this bloodthirsty crew standing before him with drawn and cocked weapon in his hand, ready to carry out the terrible threat he had made against his life.

It was enough to make a man's head swim with wonder and excitement, for the change was as sudden as unexpected, and as terrible as complete.

"Now, traitor, you shall receive a proper reward for your act!" cried the captain, lifting his pistol to a level with the trembling body, and fixing his flashing eyes upon the man's face. "You meant to betray us, and you are doomed!"

"I s'pose it's no use me saying a word about the matter," said the deserter, looking unflinchingly at the muzzle of the weapon covering his breast. "You've got an idea in your head, and all I can say won't prevent you from shooting."

"Do you mean to tell me that you did not come to betray me to my foes?" cried out the leader of the outlaws. "Do you not know the amount that you were to receive for your act?"

"I should say not," replied the cool card at the tree. "In fact, I've not received any offer, for the very good reason that I had no such intention. Pop away, and be hanged to you! I've always wanted to die with a bullet through my heart."

"Fool!" cried the threatening captain, still pointing the pistol toward the apparently doomed man. "Confess your intentions of treachery, and I may content myself with slicing your ears, and sending you back to my foes as a warning that my faithful spies are everywhere."

"You go to the devil!" cried the prisoner. "I've only told you the truth, and I'm not going to make up lies even to save my bacon. I've stole, and I've stabbed, and perhaps I've killed, but I've never allowed myself to talk crooked. You've been lied to, and my goose is cooked, that's all. Bang away."

The ferocious gleam departed from the eyes of the captain, and he allowed his hand to fall to his side.

His laugh rang out loudly, as if it were a signal; the men sprang forward and released the surprised teamster, and with shouts, welcomed him as their comrade.

The man could no more understand this change than he could the preceding one, and he looked inquiringly at Captain Slasher.

"Oh, that was only a little game of mine that is practiced every time any one comes to join us," said the latter. "You see, the government is trying to wipe me out, and the only way they can do it is by getting one of their secret service men among my boys. I always put this dodge into practice, and it works as good as a charm. If the man is a spy he falls in the trap, confesses, begs for his life, and gets a dozen bullets through his body. I know you now, and accept you a member."

"Oh," said the teamster.

"What's your name?"

"Jack Beales."

"Well, Mr. Beales, I welcome you as one of the Brethren of the Plains, and feel confident that you will make a good addition to my crowd of screamers."

"Thank you," said Beales.

"Follow me. I want to have a talk with you for awhile," said Captain Slasher; and with Sholum Alarkum, Tolahresser and the cruel Mutseer at his heels, the leader of this very select party led the way into one of the numerous huts.

The redskins, true to their early training, very complacently squatted on the floor of the hut.

Captain Slasher seated himself upon a rude stool, and kicked a bench towards Jack Beales for the latter to sit on.

"Now for business," said the leader, turning to the newly-made member. "Do you know how much money is in the box?"

"No."

"Cannot make a guess?"

"There must be many thousands. Perhaps a hundred thousand."

"Is it guarded any more closely than anything else in the train?"

"Yes," said Beales. "Old Carter keeps special guard over it himself."

"Where is the wagon located in the train?"

"Always about the center."

"Then there's no chance whatever of cutting it out from the rest, whipping the horses, and making off with it?"

"Nary a chance," said Beales. "Some men in the train are watching that wagon day and night, and it would be bullet or rope to try such a game as that."

"Then the only way to get the box is by tackling the train?"

"That's the ticket."

Captain Slasher turned to the redskins, who were taking everything in without making a sound.

"You see," he said, "we must get some help somewhere or other. They cleaned us out when we had a thundering sight more men than we've got now, and it's cussed likely that they can do it again. Now, I'm not going to let that box of money slip through my fingers by any means, not if I have to tackle that train with ten men. I like fighting well enough, but I'm not going to let my boys be cleaned out again if I can help it. We've got to have more men, so put your wits to work and try to find out how we're to get them."

Mutseer turned to Sholer Alarkum.

"Better get Motzer-Ponum," he said.

"He has many brave warriors," said the chief.

"And his braves love fighting," put in Tolahresser.

"He is the chief of the Osages, isn't he?" asked Captain Slasher.

"Yes," said Mutseer.

"How many warriors would he be willing to send me?"

"As many as we have."

"Then let's strike him by all means," said the captain. "But I thought your tribe was at war with the Osages."

"The hatchet is buried," said Tolahresser. "We are friends."

"And therefore are willing to stop murdering each other in order to combine and murder other people," said the captain. "Well, we'll have something to bite, and then we'll ride to the Osage village. We can reach there before dark. And by the way, if that infernal steam contrivance gets in my way again I'll make a dash for it."

"It would be valuable to you," suggested Jack Beales.

"So I think," said Captain Slasher. "I want to lay my peepers on that boy who runs the machine, and I'll make him wish he'd never left his mammy."

A hasty meal was prepared and eaten by the band, and then they walked down to a grassy enclosure where their horses were picketed.

They were soon mounted, and with their leaders at the front, the motley crew dashed away to the Osage village, and by hard riding reached there before dark.

The shout which alarmed Frank and Dash Hallett had been raised by them, for the keen eyes of Captain Slasher had made out the form of the boy he had cursed for his late defeat.

CHAPTER XVII

SOME EXPLANATIONS.

DASH HALLETT was a decent sort of runner, and so was Frank, but the boy seemed to grow tired after running a few hundred yards, and pantingly subsided to a walk.

"Lively!" said Dash.

"Can't," gasped Frank.

"Why?"

"I am loaded down," panted Frank, but with long strides he made pretty good time in the direction of the grove.

He plunged through the trees with Dash at his side, and was immediately taken in tow by Charley Gorse, who took the young genius by the arms, and almost lifted him over the ground to where the Steam Man was standing.

Barney Shea was seated on the driver's seat, with his arms resting on the break, very cosily puffing away on a clay pipe that was as black as a coal.

The steam was well up in the monster, as was attested by the hissing sound coming from the valves.

"Tired out, old boy?" asked Charley, as Frank stumbled and almost fell.

"Dead beat," said Frank, regaining his feet and breathing hard. "This cussed shirt is enough to kill anyone if they are foolish enough to run."

And to Dash Hallett's great surprise, the boy removed the wires from his coat, took two curiously-shaped concerns out of his pockets, and then re-

moved a splendidly made shirt, formed entirely of polished links of steel.

These were laid in the trunk on the floor of the wagon, and then Frank jumped up to his seat.

"I feel like a new man," he said. "How darned heavy that was. Where are those chaps that were following?"

"I can hear the patter of horses' hoofs on the ground," said Dash.

"Then hop in the wagon," said Frank, and laid his hand on the connecting steam rod.

Dash hopped in.

The Steam Man stood just on the edge of the grove, hidden from the Indians in the village by the intervening trees.

The sound of horses' feet could be distinctly heard.

Frank did not pull the rod, for he wished to see who was in pursuit.

The steam man was so constructed that he could be started or stopped at a very short notice. A good head of steam could be let on at once, and the old fellow would start off at a high rate of speed, an unpleasant jerk being the only result.

Therefore, being desirous of seeing who was in pursuit, and not having the fear of capture before his eyes, the boy waited for the enemy to appear.

Soon the hoofs of the rapidly advancing steeds came crashing through the outer edge of the bushes which grew thickly among the trees.

Frank caught a glimpse of many mounted men, heard savage oaths and excellent English curses, and then he made up his mind that the section of country he was then in was growing very sultry, rapidly, too.

He pulled the rod, and let on almost a full head of steam and then shut it off a little, following the plan adopted by the most experienced engineers.

Then he pulled the whistle cord.

The Steam Man made a jump.

Then he shrieked.

With the jump down went Dash Hallett in the bottom of the wagon.

Barney Shea tumbled squarely on top of him.

Frank held the reins for support, and his cousin secured himself by grasping the iron brake.

"Forward!" yelled the voice of the daring Captain Slasher. "There's the Steam Man. One hundred reward for him."

Away leaped the huge iron monster out on the grassy plain.

The Indians had not been able to clearly comprehend who and what the Steam Man really was.

They believed him to be the devil on a tour, or else a sort of envoy extraordinary of his satanic majesty, sent to roam this earth in search of victims.

Anyhow they very respectfully declined to go in pursuit of the tall chap.

The white men held no such fears, and with Captain Slasher and Jack Beales leading the van, they dashed after the old long stepper, but they were no match for the iron-limbed man.

They fired several shots at the inmates of the wagon, and Dash Hallett could not stand that.

He seized one of the loaded rifles which were always kept in readiness near the driver's seat.

The muzzle flew up, the stock touching his shoulder, and his quick eye flashed for one brief instant over the barrel and through the sights.

Then his finger pressed the trigger; the gun went off with a loud bang, and Dash crowed exultantly.

The others looked around.

Captain Slasher and his horse were both tumbling to the ground.

This neat effect put a damper on the ardor of the pursuers, and they concluded to stop for the captain.

All dismounted and gathered around the fallen leader.

Dash could see them lift the captain from under the body of the horse, and he noted that the leader appeared to be uninjured.

"Guess I didn't hit horse nor man," muttered the hunter. "That critter must have stumbled just when I pulled trigger."

He saw the horse regain his feet, and then beheld the captain remount him.

The pursuers did not continue the chase, for they began to see that their jaded horses were no match for the tireless limbs of the Steam Man.

Frank had kept up just a nice rate of speed, confident in the ability of his man to outstrip the pursuers in less than three minutes with the full power of steam turned on.

He did not increase his rate now, but kept slashing through the rank grass at about twenty miles an hour, keeping a lookout for obstacles and handling the novel reins with skill.

"I'm not going fast, because I don't really want to get a great distance away from the village," he said to Charley.

"Why?"

"Don't you know?"

"I don't."

"Didn't I start out to bring back Dash Hallett and the Englishman?"

"That's so," said Charley.

"An', be the same token," put in Barney, "how was it ye forgot to do that same?"

"To tell the truth," smiled the driver, "I was so excited that I never thought a thing about the Englishman. You see, I had to beat that medicine-man that they've got in the village, and that drove the Cockney out of my head. But I bamboozled old—what's his name?"

"Mowsher Abiner," returned Hallett, to whom the boy had appealed.

"That's it, Mowsher Abiner," said Frank. "The Indians consider him the greatest living medicine-man in the universe, but I made him crawl to his hole."

"You just did," said Hallett, looking with approval upon Frank's slight form and long head. "You actually beat the devil himself, at his own games, and on his own grounds, too, for the matter of that. But I'm a little cur'us in these things. Do you mind letting on how it was that knife didn't stick me when you let it drive full split at my breast?"

"Why, of course not," said Frank. "I can show you how the thing was done in less than two quivers of an eyelash. Here, Charley, grab the ribbons."

Charley Gorse took the reins, and then Frank clambered down from the seat and went for that all-containing trunk.

He took the dirk he had used in the Indian village.

"That's the article, isn't it?"

"Guess so," said Dash. "You're such a very tricky little cuss that I don't feel willing to swear to anything."

Frank laughed.

"Well, it looks like it?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," said Dash.

"And you have my assurance that it was used in the village," said Frank. "This is one of my odd freaks. In the first place, you will notice that the handle is quite as wide and almost as long as the blade."

"I see."

"And that it would be possible for the blade to retreat into the handle?"

"Yes—yes."

"Therefore it would be very plain, too, when I make known the construction to you. Notice two knobs, one on each side, and made to match?"

"I see them."

"This on the right hand side sets a remarkably stiff spring on the inside," said Frank. "When this spring is set you can hurl the blade deep into a tree."

"I understand," said Dash.

"Then," said the young inventor, "all we have to do is to touch this other spring and the stiff spring is unset. Then the blade sets on top of a limber spiral spring, strong enough to keep it out from the hollow hilt, but also limber enough to be driven back by the blade when the point comes in contact with any solid body. Of course, as soon as the knife bounds back from a body the spiral spring forces the blade out again. It's a very simple principle."

"Just so," said Dash Hallett. "But it took a little better thing than simplicity to hatch up the idea. But see here, you had that stiff spring set when you drew blood from the redskin's hand."

"Yes, and it was set when the point drew blood from mine."

"Then you couldn't have unset it," said the hunter, "for you didn't take it in your hand till after he'd hurled it full at your heart."

"Oh, that puzzles you?" cried Frank.

"Course it does," said Dash.

Frank pointed to the carefully made shirt of steel.

"You forgot that," he said. "I made that myself, and no knife will pierce it."

"Oh!" said Dash, "I savvy now."

"Anything else you don't understand?" asked the boy.

"Why, yes," said Dash. "What made the old chap jump and holler when he saluted the relative of the sun and moon?"

"Did you notice the little wires strung over my shoulder?"

"Yes."

"And did you see me take out two curiously made concerns from the pocket of my coat?"

"I did."

"Well," said Frank, "those odd-shaped things were inclosed batteries, and the wires were connected with them. When Mowsher Abiner laid his paws on me he touched the wires, and in less than the tenth part of a second, he received a heavy charge of electricity from the batteries. They are little, but, oh, my!"

Here the Steam Man began to slack up, and Frank saw that they were about entering a little grove.

"About time for supper, isn't it?" Charley asked.

"I suppose so," said Frank, and with slow tread the monster was driven under the shade of a large tree, close to where a sparkling spring bubbled up from the ground. "I'm good and hungry, I know, and I suppose you are too."

"And what comes next?" asked Dash.

"Why, we must try to rescue that poor British subject from his dusky bride," laughed the young genius. "And we must get horses at the same time, for my trap won't accommodate so many passengers."

"But you'll not think of going back there with your machine at night?" said Dash.

"Why not?" cried Frank. "I can travel as well by night as by day, and, for the matter of that, can fight like the devil in the dark."

"Oh, you mean with your night pistols, as you call them."

"Yes, how did you know about them?" asked Frank.

Dash related his adventure with the bear when Charlie had shot the monster by the aid of the light.

"But I can't see how it was done," said Dash Hallett. "I think you're a match for a hull tribe of reds, cuss me if I don't."

"I think so, too," smiled Frank Reade. "But just look here and I'll explain to you the principle of this neat arrangement."

He drew the night pistol or revolver from his pocket, and allowed Dash Hallett to examine it closely.

"You see that it is just the same as any other self-cocking revolver."

"Yes; only it's got a much larger bore than common," said the hunter.

"That is true," said Frank. "But I made the weapons myself, and made them large for two purposes. First, to carry a large ball that should be almost as effective as the bullet from a rifle. Next I need a large bore to allow of the passage of the fire-bullet."

"Go on," said Dash.

"Well, then," said Frank, taking out one of the cartridge shells from the chamber, "here you have the whole secret. I fill every one of these shells myself. I put in a certain quantity of powder in each shell. Then in the three shells I place my heavy bullets, and they are prepared. In the other three shells I place a chemical preparation made in the shape of a bullet, and colored exactly to the hue of lead. This I do to prevent any one from noticing a difference in the bullets should it become necessary for me to play tricks with the pistol."

"Exactly," said Hallett. "Go ahead with your old show."

"The last three shells contain what you might call a Roman candle ball," said Frank. "They are made of chemicals, however, instead of powder, as fireworks are made, and last longer than the ball which shoots from a Roman candle. The weapon is loaded with alternate bullets and fire-darts. The advantage of the revolver being self-cocking is apparent. You hold your arm extended after pressing the trigger for the first time, and the fire don't reveal to you the object. You then cover it and press the trigger again, and down it comes. If you had to cock the weapon you might lose the time you needed for shooting."

"Very good," said Dash Hallett; "but if it's so dark as to need your dart, how are you to know where to fire the chemical?"

"Does the darkness affect the hearing?" cried Frank. "Can't you hear the patter of a man's feet when he's running away, although you can't see him?"

"That's so," said Dash. "How is this supper coming on?"

The Irishman and Charley Gorse had been busily preparing a meal, while Frank was explaining his inventions to the interested Hallett.

They now sung out to the others that supper was ready, and a cup of coffee for each, a slice of cold meat, some pones of white bread, and some preserves, all resulting from the donations of the emigrants to Frank, afforded the prairie travelers a very fair repast.

Here we must leave them and hurry back to the village of the Osages, for the daring Captain Slasher is there, and plans are to be discussed which will have a strong bearing on this story.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A POW-WOW.

THE bullet from the rifle in the hands of Dash Hallett had been aimed at the breast of Captain Slasher; but, as the hunter had guessed, the stumbling of the steed saved the rider.

He was slightly injured by having one leg caught under the body of the falling steed, but his follower had soon rescued him from his unpleasant situation, and in ten minutes he was all right again.

"It's no use trying to catch that machine," he said, as his men helped the horse up. "They can beat us easily, now that our nags are tired: and perhaps they can outstrip the fleetest and freshest horse. Let us go back to the village."

In a moment they were all remounted, and galloped away to the dwellings of the reds.

The Indians were gathered near to the tree where Dash Hallett had been bound.

Motzer-Ponum and his chiefs were conversing with Sholum Alarkum and his braves.

The white men galloped up and sprang from their well-trained horses, knowing that the animals would not stray away.

Captain Slasher saluted the chief, and the grave Motzer-Ponum returned his greeting in the most ceremonious style.

"Why did you let your prisoner go?" asked the captain.

From constant intercourse with the Indians on the plains, Captain Slasher could use their language as well as his own.

"The wonderful medicine-man said that the Great Spirit had so ordered," replied the chief.

Motzer-Ponum meant Frank Reade.

"What medicine-man?" demanded the captain.

"The relation of the sun, moon, and stars," said the chief.

"What are you talking about?" demanded Captain Slasher.

"The wonderful medicine."

"But who is he?"

"The relation of the sun—"

"You said that once before," broke in the other. "But who is this medicine? Where is he now?"

"You should know best."

"And why?"

"Because you pursued him."

"What, that boy?" cried the captain.

"Yes, he is a great medicine."

"Ha—ha!" roared the captain. "Frightened by a smart boy. But say, haven't you got a very great medicine yourself?"

"Mowsner Abiner," said the chief.

"Yes, that's his name. What did he say to this young medicine?"

"He bowed his head in submission to the mighty power of this relation of the moon and sun."

"Bully for the boy!" laughed the captain. "But what can he do?"

"Many wonderful things," said the great and mighty Motzer-Ponum. "His heart cannot be pierced, and he can give a weapon the power of life and death."

"Phew!" whistled the captain. "I must try to get my hands on this very clever young medicine. Tell me what he did."

Motzer-Ponum had been greatly impressed by the wonder-workings of the tricky young genius, and he now hastened to give the captain a highly colored version of the boy's exploits, enlarging upon everything with a genuine Indian regard for veracity, and succeeded in making Frank Reade out to be a very wonderful person indeed.

"That's all very clever," said the other. "But we will drop this illustrious descendant of the heavenly bodies, and with your permission go into council."

"You wish to have a big talk?"

"A very big talk," said the captain.

"Let the council-fire be kindled," said the chief. "Let my braves and warriors gather around me."

Boys, you have doubtless heard of the red-tape business rignarole, in connection with the circumlocution office at Washington. That highly ceremonious bureau don't begin to match a tribe of savages for ceremony and show.

There's got to be the council-fire; there has got to be the council-pipe, or calumet of thought; there has got to be a speech in full terms from each and every brave and warrior entitled to speak, and the fun of it is that they all knew before they ever began just exactly what decision they would arrive at.

Soon the council-fire was kindled beneath the tree which had so lately been doing duty for a death-stake.

The chiefs of both tribes gathered together, forming a good-sized inner circle.

Captain Slasher and the deserter also formed part of this inner circle.

In a larger outer circle were ranged the warriors and braves of the Osage and Sioux tribes.

The pipe was filled, lit, and slowly went its rounds.

Then it was removed, and the council was declared open.

At a sign from Captain Slasher, the old Sioux chieftain arose to his feet and the circles became deathly still.

"Brethren," began Sholum Alarkum, "we need your assistance. Our common enemy, the invading white men, who wrest our most prized hunting-grounds from us, rides over the plains. My brother here"—pointing to Captain Slasher—"who has a white skin and an Indian breast, hates them fully as much as we do.

"A large wagon train is now passing over the vast plains, laden with many valuable things we could use. There is also much fire-water in this train, and we like that as much as do the white men.

"One sun ago, we, my white brother and me, swept down upon the train, thinking to kill them and take the wagons.

"We were met by a heavy fire, our followers were thrown into disorder, and an immense man with a voice like a buffalo and two eyes of fire rushed upon us from the darkness, and we were driven away, leaving some of our best and bravest men, red and white, dead or dying on the plains.

"Now we come to you to ask you to help sweep these men from the plains before they can settle on our best lands, kill our deer and buffalo, and trap our otter and mink. We are not strong enough to attack them alone, but with the braves of the Osage tribe we can sweep them from our prairies. My white brother will now talk to you."

The worthy Sholum Alarkum sat down amid a prolonged murmur of applause, for he had cunningly spoken in such a manner as to arouse the most bitter and rankling feelings of hatred within the breasts of his hearers.

As the captain arose to his feet he noted with satisfaction the gleaming eyes and compressed lips of the Osages.

He knew that it now needed but the offer of reward to win their support, for in their Indian character hatred is only equalled by love or gain.

"I love my red brothers," he cried, stretching forth his hand impressively, "and I hate the people of my own race. I would protect the rights of my red brothers, and if they will aid me I will scourge these white people from the plains. I do not want one simple article of value from the train. All the blankets, all the fire-water, all the goods that belong to wigwams, I will give to the brave Osage warriors who are willing to follow me. Shall I have your aid?"

He sat down, and Motzer-Ponum immediately sprang to his feet, and in emphatic terms said that he pledged himself and fifty of his best braves and warriors to the support of the white captain.

The Indians all applauded this, and then the council broke up.

"Is it settled, captain?" inquired the deserter.

"Yes, they will come to my banner with a half hundred men."

"And when will you start?"

"To-night, if you know where to go to," said the captain.

"I know where," said Beales, "but darn me if I know how to go there. Do you know the place called Three Islands?"

"Oh, yes," said Captain Slasher. "The name has been given to three groves that are almost connected. They are about ten miles south of here, a matter of about one hour's ride with fresh horses."

"Then you know where to go," said Jack Beales, "for by this time the train has come to a halt at Three Islands."

"Then their goose is just about as good as cooked," confidently remarked the amiable Captain Slasher. "Three Islands is just about as nice a place for us to pop down upon as I could ask for. There's room there for both sides, and they can't stand behind trees and shoot down my boys who stand on the prairie. There's trees enough there for both parties, and we shall fight them on even ground."

"That is," said Jack, "if we cannot surprise them."

"Just so," said the captain. "There's Motzer-Ponum calling to us. I suppose he wants our royal presence at a lay-out."

Of course this conversation had all taken place in good English, as Jack Beales understood nothing of the Indian tongue.

As the two villains walked away from the spot, a face was thrust through the thick-leaved branches of the tree.

Then a head and shoulders came into view, and the beaming features of our most esteemed Cockney, George Augustus Fitznoodle, could now be distinguished in a frame of green.

The Londoner carefully removed himself from the tree, and with an awful grunt dropped to the ground.

"Bless my 'eart h'and soul," muttered this excitable individual, looking after the two rascals with an expression of indignation and contempt.

"H'is h'it h'in the bounds h'of possibility that

two white men could conspire with 'eathenish savages to take the lives h'of their fellow-men? 'Orrible—most 'orrible. H'if h'I 'ad the power, 'ow gladly would h'I travel to Three h'Islands. But h'I may yet be h'enabled to save these poor people from these 'orrid brutes!"

And so he was!

CHAPTER XIX.

GEORGE AUGUSTUS WALKS OFF.

THERE was one beneficial result from all the excitement and hubbub which had taken place in the Indian village.

In consequence of the very many important affairs claiming their attention, the redskins had failed to keep a very strict watch over George Augustus Fitznoodle, Esq.

The latter individual had been impressed with the idea that his every movement was watched by a pair of keen eyes, for the very lovely Widow Shoffusguy had told him that he could not leave the village without her knowledge.

"But h'it seems to me that the very h'important h'events h'of the day 'ave distracted the close regard h'of these red 'eathen," soliloquized George Augustus, seating himself upon the rude doorstep of his wigwam. "H'I would like to be h'on the safe side; but, then, for liberty h'I must be willing to run h'all the risks, h'and h'encounter h'all the dangers. H'I certainly shall h'endeavor to cut my lucky 'alf an hour from now, h'if my dark-skinned wife don't return."

His wife had gone off to a sort of Indian political caucus, a primary affair, where the affairs of the tribe were dealt with by the female members thereof.

George Augustus waited for some time—his wife returned not.

The village was now very quiet, with the exception that boisterous sounds frequently came from the big lodge where the serene Motzer-Ponum was entertaining Captain Slasher and his red and white friends in good style.

Liquor was flowing freely around the festive board where all the red and white thieves sat, and the jollity of the occasion was indeed great.

Fitznoodle looked around him.

The night was not very light; nothing but the faint glimmering of the eternal stars lit up the gloom of the village.

All Indians of any note whatever were taking part in the grand testimonial feast tendered to Captain Slasher, and the awful Sholum Alarkum.

George Augustus crept inside of the wigwam, and being familiar with its construction, he managed to place his hands upon a long knife which rested upon two pegs driven into the wall.

Armed with this weapon, the property of his wife, George Augustus crawled forth to do or die, or, in other words, to make his escape or be retaken.

He crept stealthily away from the door of his wigwam, and then, after going about ten steps, suddenly pulled up.

"What a blessed fool h'I h'am," muttered the Englishman. "'Ow h'am h'I to get h'away from 'ere when h'I don't know the way h'out? Never mind, h'I'll go h'in h'any direction, and h'it's a blessed sure thing that h'it'll bring h'out somewhere. Now for liberty h'or—no, not death, for h'I really think h'I'd rather h'embrace Shoffusguy than death—very much rather."

Having arrived at this conclusion, the very brave George Augustus Fitznoodle, speculator in undiscovered coal and iron mines, very cautiously crawled along toward the door of Motzer-Ponum's big wigwam.

He had chosen to go that way because he knew that it would bring him somewhere near the path he had been traveling when first surprised by the Osages.

He got safely past the feasting place, and was congratulating himself on his sure and easy escape, when a tall form arose from the ground and confronted him.

The Cockney saw at a glance that it was one of the Osage tribe who stood before him, very effectually barring his path.

The Osage peered closely at him, and said something in his native tongue.

Of course the Englishman hadn't the least idea what he said.

The Indian reached out his hand, and pointed in the direction of the lovely Widow Shoffusguy's lodge.

"Oh, yes, thank you," said Fitznoodle. "You would like me to travel back to the fireside h'of my darker-colored 'alf, but h'allow me to h'assure you that h'I don't h'intend to do h'any such thing. H'in fact, sir, we were married h'in 'aste, but we h'are not partners for life. H'I shall never go back to that 'orrid 'ole thing again while h'I 'ave breath left h'in my mortal corporosity, h'and h'I don't think you can make me."

This was said with a goodly amount of confidence and bluster, for the brave George Augustus, be it known to the reader, was gripping a knife very firmly all the while.

The Indian did not understand George Augustus any more than George Augustus understood him; but he could guess from the Englishman's manner that the latter emphatically refused to go back to the wigwam he had deserted.

He again lifted his hand and sternly pointed to the lonely lodge of the lovely Widow Shoffusguy. "H'it's no use," said Fitznoodle. "You could stand there h'all night, h'old stoughton bottle, but you couldn't budge me."

Then the Indian waxed angry, and probably made up his mind that the very obstinate Englishman ought to be waxed also, so he took him by the shoulders, turned the rather surprised Cockney around with a quick twist, and kicked him, the end of his number nine moccasin landing upon the person of Mr. Fitznoodle about two inches below the buttons on the back of his coat.

George Augustus didn't holler.

He was sent spinning by the force of the kick, and went rolling over and over on the ground, but he retained his hold on the knife.

He had made up his mind to escape; he had screwed up his wavering courage to the sticking point; he had armed and equipped himself for the battle, so to speak, and he was not going to be subdued by a mere kick—not but what a dozen hearty ones might have taken all the grit out of him in five minutes.

He picked himself up, and found that he was in a desperate state of mind. His English blood was insulted and he was now at boiling point, and he resolved to strike back blow for kick.

To be sure he had the best of it, seeing that the Osage had no idea of being attacked; but then you know the Osage was a red Indian, and George Augustus was only a Cockney.

He gripped his knife firmly, threw back his hand, and rushed upon the Osage.

The latter was taken unawares.

Not suspecting resistance, he had taken no notice of the Englishman after kicking him, and thus the insulted Londoner had the advantage of catching his enemy off his guard.

He made a desperate stab at the startled Osage, the latter threw up his hands in a vain effort to ward off the blow, but the heavy blade crashed through bone and flesh, and sank to the hilt in the red-skin's breast.

The red-skin dropped, and George Augustus, after pulling the stained knife out from the wound and wiping it on the dress of the defunct Indian, continued on his pathway to liberty.

"H'I'm a very desperate man!" muttered the valliant Englishman, as he tramped away from the village, keeping the knife in his hand all the time, although at the risk of wounding himself should he stumble and fall. "H'I h'am not to be trifled with, and woe be h'unto that man who bars my fight to the dome h'of liberty. H'I shall strike—h'I shall stab—h'I shall murder! Ha—ha!"

By which it may be seen that the excitable George Augustus had worked himself up to the heroic pitch over killing an Indian whom he had taken unawares.

He was soon clear of the village, and by taking the north star for his guide managed to keep on a straight course.

He walked along mile after mile with the sole companionship of the stars and his own thoughts, until he began to feel decidedly fatigued.

Then he saw the faint glimmer of a fire flashing indistinctly some distance away on his route, and concluded to approach the place very cautiously and see whether the builders of the fire were white men or red-skins.

He moderated his pace and cautiously advanced towards the fire, which could now be seen through the trunks of trees; so the Englishman knew that he was approaching a grove.

He drew near to the trees, and could hear the murmur of voices.

"H'I must get closer," said Fitznoodle, and was advancing when the click of a trigger saluted his ears, and a voice rang out from the grove:

"Halt! White or red?"

"White—white!" yelled Fitznoodle, dancing up and down in front of the tree from which the challenge came, expecting every moment to feel the deadly bullet tearing through his body; "for 'eavens sake, my dear sir, don't shoot!"

A merry laugh was excited by the poor Cockney's terror, and a tall man came forth into the starlight, carrying a rifle in his hands.

He looked at the trembling Englishman with amusement and contempt.

"What's your name?"

"George Augustus Fitznoodle, sir, of London, h'England. H'I'm a speculator h'in coal h'and h'iron mines."

"Where are you going?"

"H'anywheres," said Fitznoodle. "H'I was "

prisoner h'among the 'orrid h'Osage h'Indians, h'and h'I've just made h'off by h'extreme bravery. H'I 'ope you will grant me protection h'and shelter h'until the morning."

"That's jes as the capen and the boss says," returned the guard. "Foller me, and I'll take you to the boss."

"H'and who h'is 'e, h'if h'I might make so bold h'as to h'ask?" inquired Fitznoodle.

"Harry Hale."

"H'and what h'is 'e?"

"The boss of an expedition sent out by the government to clean out the hull crowd of robbers and thieves," was the reply. "He's one of the secret service detectives!"

Fitznoodle was conducted by his tall guide through the mazes of the trees to where the fire was burning.

Around the embers which had been kindled for the purpose of cooking, sat or lounged about thirty men, dressed for the most part in the regular prairie suits of woollen and hide.

Prominent among them stood two men who would have attracted considerable attention in any situation.

One was a grizzled old mountain and plain traveler by the name of Carter, a brother to the fearless guide who had the emigrant train under his charge.

Bill Carter was perhaps fifty years of age, but his rugged form seemed to defy the hand of time. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and as tough and strong as some of the mountain trees he had felled in his day.

The other man who engaged the attention of George Augustus was perhaps thirty years of age.

He was of medium size, but his form was as perfectly strong as that of the panther.

His eyes, gray, sharp, piercing, seemed to glance through a man, and he seemed one born to command.

Before these two men the trembling Cockney was conducted by the guide.

"Halloo!" cried Bill Carter. "What in thunder have you picked up now?"

"A chap what was sneakin' aroun' on the outside o' the camp," said the guard. "He says his name is Filibuster Canoodle, or something like that, and he wants you to give him protection and shelter over night."

"Excuse me, sir," said the Englishman, with an oracular wave of his hand. "You 'ave mistaken my name. H'it h'is not Canoodle; h'I h'am George h'Augustus Eitznoodle, h'of London, h'England, a speculator h'in coal h'and h'iron mines."

The sharp-eyed man looked him over a moment, and made up his mind that the speculator was one of those solid men with whom it was very handy to be on good terms.

"You are very welcome, Mr. Fitznoodle," was his greeting. "The shelter of my camp and the protection afforded by my men shall be yours as long as you see fit to tarry with us. My name is Hale, Harry Hale, and I am a detective in the secret service of the United States. This is the leader of my band of brave fellows. Mr. Carter, this is Mr. George Augustus Fitznoodle. I hope you will do well by him."

"Happy ter meet yer, Englisher," growled out Bill Carter, who had a voice that was a cross between a base-drum and one of those terrible Dutch trombones. "I'm only a rough-and-ready, stranger, but Bill Carter knows a gentleman when he sees the gennywine article. Tip us yer flipper."

"Eh!" cried Fitznoodle.

"Flopp over yer grapplin' iron," said Bill Carter, thrusting out a grimy hand that was like a bear's paw. "Plant your right bower thar, English."

"Really," cried the much-puzzled George Augustus, "h'I h'am h'at an h'entire loss to comprehend the h'exact meaning h'of your strange remarks."

"English, I pass," sorrowfully observed the rough old case, who had dropped his hand, and regarded the big-worded cockney with wonder. "I don't smoke yer."

Harry Hale, who had been much amused listening to all this odd talk, now came to the rescue.

"You do not understand Mr. Carter," he said to the Cockney. "He wants to shake hands with you."

"H'ah!" cried Fitznoodle, very much relieved by the explanation. "With h'all my 'eart h'and soul."

He put forth his hand.

"That's the ticket," cried Carter. "Now yer a-smoking me, and I'm smoking you, Mr. Canoodle, I'm happy to meet yer."

He grasped the cockney's soft hand in his own bony palm, and shut down upon him with so much warmth, that poor George Augustus hopped and shouted with pain.

"Snakes and bufflers!" growled old Bill. "I've not hurt yer, have I stranger?"

"Oh, no," groaned Fitznoodle, trying to take the cramps out of his hand, "h'only h'I wish you hadn't been quite so happy to me, that's h'all."

"Ho—ho—ho!" laughed Bill. "That's cussed cute, my friend; well, I'll leave yer with the boss while I take a scoot around the grove to see to things."

He walked away from them with his rifle resting in the hollow of his arm, and although he was an old and very heavy man, they could not catch the sound of his practiced feet as he moved skillfully through the trees.

These old western hard-huts who live on the mountains and prairies, and wander for years through trackless forests, have a style of locomotion that is truly very wonderful, and in some strange manner they pass in silence over ground that nine men out of ten would stumble over.

The forests and prairies, the mountains and streams, and the glorious canopy with its moon and stars are all as books to them, to be read by that education they gain by a lifetime of experience.

"Be seated, Mr. Fitznoodle," requested Hale, and placed a log for the Englishman to sit on.

"Are you hungry enough to eat a bearsteak?"

"H'I really thinks'n I could do a bit h'in that way," said George Augustus, who was then served with a well-done slice from bruin's haunch. "May h'I know what you h'intend doing in these parts, Mr. 'Ale?"

"Certainly," said the detective. "In such a section of the country as this there is not anything to be gained by keeping affairs secret. As I told you I am a detective of the secret service force."

"H' exactly."

"And I can now inform you that my present mission is to hunt down and capture or exterminate the several bands of red and white robbers who have for many years past been the plague and bane of prairie travel."

"H'and you think you can do it?"

"I'll do it, or I'll die!" said Harry Hale, and a red gleam leaped to his gray eyes. "I have something more than the mere performance of duty to urge me on."

"Ah?" exclaimed Fitznoodle, "you 'ave been a sufferer from their cruelty?"

"You may well say so," said Hale, seeming to relapse into a gloomy train of thought. "The devils, the fiends!"

"H'if h'I might make so bold h'as to h'ask 'ow much did they rob you h'of?" said Fitznoodle.

The detective lifted his head and said, with flaming eyes:

"A life!"

"Eh! What?" ejaculated Fitznoodle.

"A life," said Hale. "I repeat it—a life. 'Twas not mine, but it was as dear to me as my own could be. I had a brother whom I loved as a son. He was younger than myself, but bold, keen, hardy, noble, and big-breasted, and as true as steel."

"He was sent out upon just such a mission as this, sent by the same powers to capture the same gang of robbers, thieves, and murderers."

"He was too venturesome, and in a moment of foolhardy bravery, placed himself in the hands of the enemy, hoping to be able to get an easy victory by seeming to desert from his men. In some unknown manner the trick was discovered by that brutal Captain Slasher, and my brother's body was filled with bullets. But I shall avenge him. Captain Slasher is doomed if he ever crosses my path."

"I reckon," the guide said, who had come back while Hale was speaking, "he won't stand much show with old Bill, either—"

"H'excuse me," said Fitznoodle. "Didn't you say Captain Slasher?"

"I did," said Hale.

"Then h'I can tell you where to look for the brute within the hour," said Fitznoodle. "H'I 'ave just left the village where 'e h'is."

He then related to the two leaders all that had taken place in the Osage village that day, carefully recounting the conversation he had heard between the captain and Jack Beales.

When he had concluded, the orders of the two leaders rang sharply out; horses were brought in from a corral close at hand, the men were soon mounted behind Bill Carter, and at the word of command the brave fellows dashed away for the Three Islands.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CAPTURE OF THE STEAM MAN.

FRANK READE was undecided about going back to the Osage village.

He did not fear a tribe of savages, for they were so superstitiously afraid of the Terror of the West,

that he reckoned the Steam Man more than a match for all the ignorant redskins on the plains.

"What will you do about the poor young Britisher?" asked Dash Hallett, who was lying at the feet of the Steam Man, smoking a pipe and admiring the build of the man of metal.

"I hardly know," said Frank.

"Shure ye'll not be after lavin' the poor body among them haythens?" put in our friend Barney Shea.

"Oh, I don't mind what you say," said Frank. "You're a sort of Kilkenny cat yourself, and all you want is to get into a muss and see things fly around like Old Nick. But I'm not going to run the neck of my steam friend into danger just because you're spoiling for a row."

"Aisy now, me nate gossoon," interposed the Irishman. "I only want to help a friend in distress, do you mind?"

"That's all right," said Frank. "But if you had your way, you'd grab a big stick for a shillelah and smash plump into the Indian village, knocking everything left and right."

And quoth Barney Shea:

"Shure wouldn't that be illigant intirely?"

"I don't see why we can't go back," observed Charley.

"I don't mind the reds," said Frank, "but those cussed murdering white men don't stand in fear of the Steam Man."

"And probably admire him very much," said Gorse.

"Exactly," said Frank.

"So you're scarit that Cap'n Slasher and his gang might get their paws on your prize," said Dash.

"Thin it's Barney Shea that'll show yez the way out o' the throuble," said the Patlander.

They all turned to him.

"Why can't yez lave the machine here? Wan o' yez b'ys sthoph wid the consarn, and me and the others go to the village."

"And who'll stop?" asked Frank.

"Not me av coorse!" said Barney.

"Nor me!" said Charley.

"You can't keep this chicken tendin' baby when there's danger around!" said Dash.

"Then I must!" said Frank. "I like wild adventures well enough, but when it comes to leaving my steam friend behind, then I feel like staying with him. He's taken me out of many a scrape, and I'll not give him over to other people's care."

"Thin it's a bargain?" cried Barney.

"What?"

"Ye'll sthoph an' we'll go!"

"Yes."

"Hooroo!" cried the Irishman; but Dash Hallett clapped his broad hand over the mouth of the noisy rascal.

"Shet up yer head!" growled the hunter. "Do you want a hull band o' reds pourin' in on us? Why, even this little light is enough to be dangerous, without your hollerin' at the top of your lungs."

Dash referred to the headlight eyes of the Steam Man, which were now half closed by means of the movable eyelids that Frank had constructed with great good foresight.

"Oh, well, I was only glad!" said Barney.

"Then be more quietly glad," said Charley.

"The redskins have sharp ears."

"Will we start now, is it?" asked Barney.

"You're in a hurry," smiled Frank.

"The sooner we begin the sooner we'll get through, do ye moind," said the Irishman. "Jist let me sthand forninst a dozen of them rid divils, and be the smoke of Kate Kelley's pipe, I think I could knock smithereens out o' them."

"You'll have plenty of show," said Dash.

"What distance are we away from the Osage village?" asked Charley Gorse, picking up his rifle.

"Oh, not so far as you might think," said Frank. "I did not travel away in a very straight course, but in about a quarter of a circle. We are now perhaps four or five miles from the village."

"An hour's tramp," said Dash.

"Just about; and I propose we start just as soon as possible."

"Then come on; I can take my course by the stars," said the hunter, and throwing his rifle over his shoulder he stepped away from the Steam Man, followed by Barney and Charley.

Frank listened until their footsteps died away, and then, boy-like, he began to feel terribly lonesome and almost wish that he had run the Steam Man close to the village.

He could not see very well with the faint starlight and the half-light from the eyes of the giant, but to occupy his time, and drive off the lonesome feeling, he got out his cans and rags and leathers, and proceeded to put the old prairie racer in perfect order, oiling every joint, and cleaning every part.

This occupied him a considerable time, and

then he saw to the water in the tank, tried every catch, spring, and brace, examined all parts minutely, and decided that his steam friend was ready to travel a hundred and odd miles at good speed, without stopping to take breath.

After that he attended to all the parts of the wagon that needed oiling or bracing, for the concern was put together by means of slides and braces, and then Frank was out of work.

He put a little more coal into the stomach of the giant, regulated the dampers, and had everything in readiness to start off at the shortest notice.

What to do with himself the boy really did not know.

He had books, but not enough light to read them by, unless he could get within exact range of the half-closed stream of light which came from beneath the lids of the monster, and a big tree prevented him from taking the position.

"I can't stand this," soliloquized Frank. "I feel just like reading, so I guess I'll turn the old fellow around a little."

He mounted the box, and leaned forward to grasp the driving reins.

By some mischance, probably owing to the imperfect light, he got hold of the cord attached to the whistle.

Whoop, shriek, whoop!

The little grove resounded with the loud cry of the monster.

Frank was used to the whistle, but then he had not expected to hear it just then, and it startled him so much that he fell over backwards, still retaining his hold on the cord as he tumbled into the bottom of the wagon.

Of course, while he held on to the cord the old fellow yelled.

Frank mightily soon let go his hold, and the horrid din ceased as suddenly as it commenced.

The hills seemed to echo back the sounds from their far away cliffs, and the boy felt very uneasy.

The thought of danger to himself did not occur to him, but he conjectured that his friends would consider the whistle as a signal for them to return.

"I really don't know what to do," muttered Frank. "I suppose they are half-way on the road by this time, and yet if they heard those whistles, they would be sure and come back, and that poor Englishman would be left to misery and danger among those red and white devils. I should have looked out for just such an accident as this. A good set of signals, understood by Charley, would enable me to communicate with him even if he were five miles away. Such a thing is as good as a telegraph. Toot would tell him to come in; toot-toot, would make him understand that I had changed my mind and did not want him, and just by spacing the whistles I could fairly talk with him."

He looked up at the steam man in a very disconsolate manner.

"It's no use," he said to himself; "I must either go after them and meet them or have the brave fellows tramping back here for nothing, I'll throw on a full headlight and push away."

He turned back the eyelids of the giant traveler, and the powerful light streamed out fully, causing strange, weird shades and lights among the branches and leaves of the trees.

He got upon the seat, and reached forward for the reins.

He was very careful this time not to touch the broad whistle string.

He turned on steam very carefully, for the grove was rather dense, and he knew that he ran some risk of injuring his man if he failed to use the utmost caution.

As it is with locomotion and balance in the human form, so it was with the body and limbs of the Steam Man.

In the human form there is always one leg weaker than the other, and the stronger limb will always swing around to the weaker; our genius knew this, and made one leg of his man stronger, by throwing more steam power into the joints. It would then swing around to the less powerful limb, and thus a curve could be described.

Just as he mounted the seat, three dark forms flitted through the trees near at hand, and slowly crept near.

Frank pulled his left rein in order to move around to the right, and the man slowly lifted his legs.

The shadowy forms leaped through the flickering bars of light, and approached the machine.

The long, iron limbs slowly rose and fell, and the man of metal moved around in the direction that Frank desired to go.

The forms rapidly drew near, and now darted swiftly forward.

Frank was about to throw on a good head of steam, when Jack Beales and two of his compan-

ions leaped into the wagon, and the boy was firmly grasped by three pairs of strong hands.

"I claim this concern, in the name of the brethren of the plains," cried Beales. "Obey my orders, young man, or I'll put a bullet through you!"

CHAPTER XXI.

AT THREE ISLANDS.

CRACK!

"Help!"

First the loud peal of the rifle, then the shrill agonized appeal of a voice—the voice of a man.

These successive sounds rolled through the glades of Three Islands, startling the feathered denizens of the trees, and bringing every man of the emigrant party to his feet with a bound.

Snap Carter's command rang out like the note of a bugle.

"Surround the wagons!"

The brave guardians of the helpless women and children quickly thronged around the vehicles.

Never was there a braver cordon of true hearts.

"Silence," commanded the guide.

A perfect hush succeeded the order, and the old plainsman bent his ears to catch the slightest sound.

It came again.

"Help!"

The voice was weaker now, and to the old guide it seemed that the person in need of help was fast expiring.

His noble heart responded quickly to such a call.

He touched two of the emigrants on the arm, and bade them follow him.

"That's a human critter in distress," said the old mountaineer. "I'm going to rescue him, so follow."

He moved in the direction from which the sound came.

The eager emigrants followed after him with cocked rifles.

The guide moved cautiously, and yet with some speed.

The emigrants followed in single file, stepping directly in the track of their leader.

The sound had seemed to emanate from that portion of the grove fronting on the east, and thither Snap Carter bent his steps.

He stopped at length, for it was dangerous to go walking blindly forward in the night when there might be a score of enemies in his path.

He called aloud:

"Stranger!"

For a moment there was no reply.

"Guess he's giv up the ghost," said Snap.

But his fears were removed by a very weak voice, saying:

"Here. Come quickly; I have killed a savage, but he has wounded me."

The voice appeared to be about twenty feet distant.

"Come on," cried Snap Carter. "The cusses are all gone, and we'll soon take this poor chap to the camp."

He plunged heedlessly forward, his friends at his heels.

"Here," directed the voice.

"We're kimmin'," cheerily said Carter. "Lord love yer, stranger, we h'ain't the kind—"

He had just got that far in his comforting assurances when several forms leaped upon him from the darkness.

His companions were struck down like logs, and a sweeping blow with a rifle-butt was made at the head of the guide.

Snap Carter realized instantly the nature of the situation.

He had been decoyed away from the train by the enemies who were trying to strike him down, making swift, heavy blows at the hardy old man.

The old guide defended himself with desperate energy, for he felt that the salvation of the train depended upon his getting back to the wagons.

His long rifle, wielded by the muscles of his powerful arms, swept a circle around him.

Foes went down under the whistling stock like grass before the scythe.

The old tiger was thoroughly aroused, and he felt that he could not afford to die or allow himself to be taken prisoner just then.

He slashed away like a giant, and his foes leaped away from him.

It wasn't healthy to come within the wide sweep of the heavy butt.

Opposing tomahawks and rifles went down like chaff before the strong sweep of Snap Carter's rifle.

A voice rang out. It was the same as that which had called for help, and it said:

"Take that man alive. Don't fire on him."

But Snap had made up his mind that he would not be taken alive.

He put forth all his great strength. Like a meteor the rifle flew around his head, his foes retreated, and, suddenly turning, the old guide dashed for the train.

His limbs had not forgotten their speed.

Bushes, logs and rocks were cleared with immense leaps.

His foes rushed after him with a shout.

The old man sent back an answering cry, and continued on in his flying course.

A few moments later he reached the surprised guard and hurled the countersign at him, and at the same time ordered him to retreat to the wagon after firing the signal of danger.

The sentinel obeyed.

Together they rushed within the lines of the brave defenders.

The sounds of pursuit had ceased.

The guide sank down upon the ground exhausted.

His limbs were trembling from the mighty exertions they had made, and he was unable to stand.

The men crowded around him with eager faces.

"Are you hurt?" asked one.

"No," gasped Carter, "only winded. D—n it, man, don't strike a light unless you want to lose your scalp."

For one of the men had tried to light a match in order to see whether the guide was hurt.

"Where's Smith and Burns?" asked several of the emigrants.

They referred to the two brave fellows who had been laid low by the cruel trickery of the enemy.

"Gone under," said Carter. "Who's got any whisky?"

"Here," said several, and a dozen flasks were held out to him.

"Has there been a fight?" asked one.

"The liveliest bit of a scrimmage that this chicken has had for nigh onto fifteen years," said Carter, slowly getting upon his feet and stopping to pay attention to the flask of whisky he held in his hand. "I had the nicest kind of work for just about two minutes—couldn't been much longer. I s'pose I must have knocked over a dozen chaps with the butt-end of my old gun. Smith and Burns was jest behind me; but for all that they was both knocked over. Probably they didn't see what hit 'em, even."

"And how did you escape?"

"Cussed if I know," said the guide. "I guess I must have knocked things flyin' at a tarnal lively rate to git clear o' that gang."

"But what are we to do?"

The question came from several.

"Keep quiet and watch," said Snap. "None o' yer are plainsmen, or else I could send yer out to lay in wait, but ten to one you greenies would lose yer ha'r. A man's ears must be trained for that business. Be careful not to show the least spark of light."

The men disposed themselves around the wagons, watching and waiting with their weapons in their hands, ready to defend their loved ones to the last breath from the cruel marauders.

Snap Carter would have liked to wander out beyond the wagons to fill the post of an advance guard, and warn of the approach of the enemy, but his late experience told him that he had to deal with men as skilled as himself.

"And," soliloquized the hardy guide, "what can these poor fellers do alone? They've got good grit, they fight like catamounts under any good leader, but if I should happen to get my windpipe slit it would be a gone case with them. They can't be expected to know anything about such fighting as this, and they'd get scooped in no time."

The experienced old plainsman rested his form against a wheel, and with his good rifle lightly held in his grasp peered out as far as the darkness would permit him.

"I wish I could throw a light way out there," he muttered, trying vainly to look into the trees of the furthest grove. "Ah, that was a pesky good idea of that youngster what's got the Steam Man. He can see foes and they can't see him."

He referred to the powerful head-light of the Steam Man, which, while it was sure to dazzle the eyes of those it flashed upon, revealed them to Frank while he remained unseen.

Only the stars lit up the darkness, and their pale gleams could not dissipate the gloom caused by the heavy foliaged trees of the groves.

A faint chirping sort of sound, somewhat like the noise made by a cricket, reached the trained ears of the guide.

To him, accustomed his life long to all sorts of signals made in imitation of birds, beasts, and insects, such sounds were suspicious.

The chirping came from a point directly in advance of him, and perhaps twenty yards distant.

The old guide listened intently.

Again came that sound, but now from a point equally distant, on the extreme right hand, almost on a line with the range of the wagons.

"They're closin' in, I think," muttered Snap Carter. "I think I'll wait until I hear them upon the—"

Just at that moment the chirp came from the extreme left, and then Carter spoke to the men:

"Boys," he said, speaking low, and betraying no agitation.

"Yes," said the men.

"Don't get flustered," said Snap; "but the truth of the matter is, that our enemies are on the right and left hand, and directly in front of us. How many of 'em there is, no one knows, and we can't tell how pesky soon they may work around to the back and have us surrounded—above all things, I caution yer to speak low."

"What is to be done?"

"Watch and wait," said Snap. "There is no better words to live and die by. I'd crawl out and try to scout around a bit, but then I might get scooped, and then it would be all day with you fellers. I must stand here and give my orders, or we'll never leave this grove alive. Pass the question around the crowd: 'Is every man fully armed and got enough ammunition?'"

The question went around, and the reply assured Carter that the emigrants were in good fighting order.

Again that signal-like chirping broke the stillness.

As before, it came from the front, and was instantly answered from right and left, and a moment later came a faint chirp from the rear.

The train was surrounded!

What number of enemies were opposed to them they did not know, but could a light have been thrown athwart the faces of the emigrants, many of them would have been found deadly pale.

There is something terrible in being hemmed in on all sides by foes. If your enemy is before you, then you can brace against some firm support, perhaps, and strike with the confident feeling that your rear is safe, but when your foes are on all sides, then you feel shaky. You know not where to look for blows, and feel that you are destined to be struck down from one quarter while defending yourself from another.

A deep silence succeeded the chirping, and the emigrants listened so intently for the next sound that they scarcely seemed to breathe.

They were soon startled from the attitudes of attention.

"Charge!"

Loud and clear rang out the command on the night air.

Scarce had it sounded, before Carter's voice hurled back a defiant shout.

"It's Captain Slasher," he cried; "we've whipped him before and we can do it again."

Then there was a mighty rushing sound, as the red and white robbers poured down upon the train.

From all sides they came, yelling like a horde of unchained fiends.

"Steady men!" rang out the old guide. "Face front an' right an' left. Fire!"

The order was obeyed.

Crash!

The rifles peeled out in a prolonged din; the bullets whistled and shrieked among the trees, and the hoarse cries of the wounded, the death yells of the slain, and the loud commands of the leaders to continue the advance, told very plainly that Snap Carter had given a wise order.

Still the horde of ruffians poured down upon them.

"Fire!"

This time the command was shouted out by Captain Slasher.

Scarce had it left his lips, ere Carter had yelled out sharply:

"Drop!"

The men for the most part comprehended the danger, and understanding the order, fell quickly to the ground.

Many lives were saved by the quick order, but many a life was lost, nevertheless.

The fire had only come from one quarter, and had been directed low, so that the allies on the other quarters should not suffer from the bullets of their friends.

On came the robbers.

The four divisions of the enemy could not close in upon the emigrants while the wagons intervened, but that was what troubled the pioneers most.

They feared for their wives and little ones, while they were forced to do battle against the nearer portion of the enemy.

"Strike hard!" yelled Snap Carter, whose eyes were cat-like in the darkness. "Strike for yer wives and little uns, and never say die!"

His heavy rifle was twisted around his head as lightly as a dandy might twirl a cane.

He leaped boldly away from his men, and went crashing into the thickest of the enemy's ranks.

Skulls were crashed like eggs beneath the mighty sweep of that skillfully-wielded rifle, and his foes went down before him like mere puppets.

Shouts and yells, cries and shrieks, loud commands and pistol shots seemed fairly to clash together in the air.

Blows were desperately struck and were desperately parried even in the darkness that hung over the grove.

The marauding bands fought for plunder; the emigrants for their wives, children and lives.

A rumbling sound pierced the air, and made itself audible above the roar and din of the desperate battle.

The thundering sound of many iron-shod hoofs battering the ground came to the ears of the fighting guide, and a moment later the flashing glare of a score of torches revealed the approach of a mounted band of armed men.

Like a resistless torrent they swept down upon the outer ranks of the enemy, their wild western cheer peeling out on the breeze.

CHAPTER XXII.

DASH HALLETT'S LAST SHOT.

WHEN Frank Reade was clutched by Beales and his two comrades, he struggled desperately to free himself from their grasp.

However, the boy was powerless in their strong hands, and he soon found that he was exerting himself in vain.

"Hold still, you whelp!" cried Beales. "Stop your squirming, or I will draw my toothpick across your throat! Have you got any idea that you can get away?"

"What right have you to hold me?" cried Frank.

"The only right that is recognized on the plains," said Beales, "the right of might; and that's the ticket that wins."

"I never injured you," said the boy.

"That don't make any odds," said the brutal Beales. "I need this concern of yours, and if it wasn't for the fact that I need you to run it, I'd cut your throat!"

This made Frank understand that he was in the power of a man who would not hesitate to shed blood if occasion demanded the taking of life.

The Steam Man had come to a perfect stand-still, for the driver had only let on sufficient steam to turn the ponderous old fellow around.

The prairie racer stood motionless, his fiery eyes gleaming out brightly into the dark night.

The valves were hissing, showing the steam to be well up.

Everything was in readiness for a swift and long run, but for all that Frank Reade would have preferred stopping just where he was, to traveling in such evil company.

"Are you going to knuckle under?" asked Jack Beales.

He half drew a murderous-looking knife from his belt, as he asked the question, and he glared at the boy in such a cruel, merciless manner that Frank's blood ran cold.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Run this machine."

"Where to?"

"Three Islands."

"I don't know where that is," said Frank.

"I'll show you the way," said Beales. "Will you do it?"

"I suppose I must," said the boy.

"Now you're talking," said the deserter. "Can you start now?"

"As soon as I see that my man is in right order," said Frank.

He wanted to get out of the clutches of his foes, hoping that some chance might come up which would enable him to get the best of them.

How he longed to have on his steel shirt, and the two pocket batteries.

With these death-dealing wires crossing his breast, they could not retain their hold upon him a second.

If he could only get to his all-containing trunk for two minutes he could scare the three ruffians out of their wits.

Jack Beales did not like the idea of letting the young genius be free for a moment. He respected the brains which had conceived the wonderful Steam Man, and he made up his mind not to give up his grip on the boy while the latter was out of the wagon.

Accordingly he lifted Frank from the body of the vehicle to the ground, and with his huge hand on the boy's collar, led him up to the Steam Man.

"There," he said, "make all the examination you want, but don't get loose to cut any of your didoes on me. You'll get along with me well

enough so long as you travel straight and obey orders, but just as soon as you try to fool with me you'll die. I'm a cussed rough customer to fool with, now, I tell you, so mind your eye."

Frank saw that it was no use trying to work any dodge just then, so, after fumbling about the valves and draughts for a few moments, he said that all was correct.

Jack Beales hoisted him up into the wagon again, which was pretty well crowded with four persons and the many traps Frank carried with him.

"How fast can you go?" asked Beales.

"What rate of speed?"

"Yes."

"I could go fifty miles an hour."

"That's too thundering fast for such a night as this," said Beales. "In fact, I don't want to go half as fast. Just clap on enough steam to take us about fifteen or twenty, and that will suit me."

"All right," said Frank, who hoped to throw them somewhat off their guard by seeming cheerfulness in complying with their commands. "In what direction?"

"Do you see that star?" asked Beales.

He pointed to a large and very bright body in the sky.

"I do," said Frank.

"Then travel towards it," said Beales.

Frank turned on the steam carefully, and the man moved off at about the pace Jack Beales had requested.

The driver was perched upon his seat with his reins in his hands.

Behind him stood the three brutes, weapons drawn.

Frank understood that any attempt to prove false would be the signal for a bullet in his brain.

Many and many a time did he curse that little mishap which had brought the three brutal robbers down upon him.

A mile sped by, and half of another was finished, when a shot rang out, and a piercing shriek went up to the sky.

* * * * *

Dash Hallett and his two comrades had gone about three miles on their journey towards the Indian village, when the shrill whistle of the Steam Man came plainly to their ears, borne on the still night air.

They halted instantly.

"That was the Steam Man," said Charley.

"Right ye are," said Barney.

"What did he holler for?" demanded Dash.

"I really don't know, unless Frank wanted us to come back for something," said Charley Gorse. "I think Frank must be in some kind of trouble, and sounded the whistle to recall us."

"Faith an' must we go back?" groaned the Irishman. "Och, tare an' ouns! here was meself laughing to think of the illegant shindy that we might be after findin' in the village beyant, an' now we've got to turn tail."

"Perhaps you'll find all the fighting you could ask for," said Charley. "Frank would never have sounded that alarm unless he was in trouble."

"Then here goes for the boy," said Dash. "He's a trump, from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head, and he shan't send out a signal of distress in vain. He saved my life at the risk of his own, and while I live he shall never want a friend!"

The two men and the boy then retraced their steps at a lively rate.

They had walked for about ten minutes at a rapid, slinging walk, when a very bright light became visible far ahead.

It was the double head-light streaming from the eyes of the Terror of the West.

They pressed forward more quickly, and in a few moments could hear the tramping of the iron feet, as the man of metal rushed over the plains. They stood still in their tracks.

The Steam Man was on a line which would bring him past them at the distance of about a hundred feet, and not knowing what was the condition of affairs, they wisely stood aside.

Onward came the monster.

Dash Hallett cocked his rifle and waited patiently.

Soon the prairie traveler drew near, and then, by the light shed from the large steam-gauge, they could see the three men standing up behind Frank.

One of them was holding on to Frank's coat collar, while a knife was gripped in his hand.

That was enough for Dash.

He lifted his rifle, took a quick aim, and fired.

The brute shrieked out, and then fell back dead in the arms of Jack Beales, who pulled a heavy revolver from his belt, and glared out towards the little group.

Frank became excited and pulled on one rein, the Steam Man swung around at the touch, and

the brilliant headlight was directed full upon the hunter, who still held his rifle to his shoulder.

Jack Beales' arm flew out in a line from his shoulder, the pistol was discharged, and Dash Hallett sank, wounded and dying, to the grassy plain.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DASH HALLETT'S LEGACY.

As Dash Hallett sank back dying to the ground, our young friend Charley Gorse threw his rifle to his broad shoulder and covered the form of Jack Reeves.

A whip-like crack, sharp and clear, rang out, and then the deserter tumbled over backward to the plain, his life going out before his falling body reached the ground.

The remaining robber leaped from the wagon, and tried to run away.

"Oh, no, me foine laddy," cried Barney, starting after him on a full jump, and brandishing his well-used blackthorn stick. "This would be slightin' us, do ye see. We couldn't think o' partin' wid ye, not jist now, anyhow."

And then he leaped upon the flying man and made a clip at him with his shillelah.

The man turned and drew his knife, which pleased Barney very much.

"An' it's a foine boy ye are," he said, making another clip at the enemy's head, which the latter blocked with his drawn blade. "Ye have the rale stuff in ye, and I'll fight fairer wid ye for that same. Howld on one breath, and I'll throw me stick away."

The fearless fellow really would have thrown his shillelah away, and fought the outlaw with his knife, to show his approval, if the robber had given him time.

"Go to thunder, you blundering Irish fool," he cried, and leaped upon Rooney with upraised knife, his aim being to get inside the guard formed by the Irishman's stick. "Take that!"

He made a desperate plunge at the Patlander, but Rooney, although unable to bring his shillelah into guard quickly enough to stop the blow, managed to defend himself equally as well by kicking out with a will.

His heavy boot struck the descending blade from the hand of his foe.

The man dropped to the ground as if shot, and the knife went whistling into the air.

Barney was about to step forward to examine his prostrate opponent, when the hand of the robber flew up and Barney Shea caught the blue gleam of a pistol-barrel.

It is doubtful whether the man had effected his drop in any quicker time than our Irish friend executed his.

He realized that the pistol would go off, and that in all probability the muzzle would be pointed at his body, therefore he wisely concluded to fall as flat as a pancake, and to do so as quickly as possible.

So down went Barney Shea, and at the same moment the pistol went off.

The ball flew harmlessly above the form of the shrewd Irishman, and in less than a moment Barney was upon his feet.

He dashed down upon the enemy like some infuriated race-horse, and before the fellow could rise, the son of the Emerald Isle was showering blows upon him.

"Take that—and that—and that!" cried he, bestowing his cracks with a liberal hand. "I thought ye wor a mon afther me own heart, but I foind that ye're a murderin' spalpeen at best. Do ye call that any sort of a dacint way to do? Flop yerself down upon the grass loike ye're wounded or dead, and thin whin a mon is coming up to wake ye, what do ye do but whoek wid a big pistol and bang away at him. I thought ye war a mon worthy to be a descendant from Kilkenny whin ye faced me in such foine sthyle, but now I foind that ye're only a big throtter after all. Taste o' that, and tell me, darlint, do ye loike the flavor?"

And while talking he had been constantly showering his hearty blows over the body, head, and shoulders of the robber, until the latter rolled from under the shillelah and nimbly leaped away from the Irishman.

Barney leaped after him, but the fellow had put on an extra burst of speed, and the Irishman was unable to catch him, so he gave up the chase and came back, muttering:

"Onyhow, bedad, his head'll be afther aching for six weeks to come, an' there's a devilish little vartue in a blackthorn sthick. Shure it was only a bog throtter he was, afther all, so he was hardly an equal match for one of the Sheas."

As soon as the last of his enemies had vacated the wagon Frank Reade shut off every particle of steam and leaped to the ground.

He ran to the spot where Charley Gorse was now supporting the form of Dash Hallett.

The head of the dying hunter was pillowed on Charley's shoulder, while the boy's tears fell upon the trapper's upturned face.

They had not known each other long, but their acquaintance had begun amid wildest danger, and when brave hearts meet under such circumstances the tie contracted is usually as true and strong as could be the tried friendship of calm and uneventful years.

"Poor Dash," murmured Charley. "Can't I do something for you?"

"No, boy," returned the hunter, "my call has been trumpeted and I've got to obey the great captain of rangers. I haven't anything to regret, except that I should like to have died in a square stand up fight. But I'm glad I wasn't put under by a redskin. I'd rather die by the hand of a white man, for the reds would be crowin' for a year if they'd put Dash Hallett out of the way. Where is he?"

"Who?" asked Frank, who was now bending over the dying plainsman.

"The man who shot me."

"Lying by the wagon, with Charley's bullet through his skull," said Frank.

"Then I'm satisfied," said Dash. "I can call it a square deal."

Frank thrust his hand under the blood-stained shirt of the hunter and felt for the wound.

He had but little difficulty in finding the hole, for it was a large, ragged cut, that was big enough to let out a dozen lives.

"It's no use, my boy," said Dash. "I've got my last sickness, and nothing on earth can keep me from the happy hunting grounds. Ain't it so?"

"I'm afraid you've got your death wound," said Frank.

"Of course I have—who's that?"

For just at that moment came the cowardly pistol shot fired by the outlaw.

Frank could not tell, but the next moment he and the rest heard Barney's voice uttering exclamations as he rained blows upon the robber.

In a few moments the Irishman came up to them panting and puffing, his shillelah besmeared with blood from the nose of his foe.

"Tare an' ouns! and is he kilt?" he asked, gazing upon Dash, who lay upon Charley's broad shoulder with closed eyes.

"Hush," said Frank.

Hallett opened his eyes.

"Yes, I'm going, Barney," he said. "The trumpet has sounded and I must go home. Before I go I want to say something. I've got something to leave. What do you call it?"

"A legacy," said Frank.

"That's it," said Hallett. "I'm dying, and I don't want to die unless I can leave things settled in some sort of shape. In the first place I want you all to promise me that ye'll not desert poor Fitznoodle. I want you to see that poor greeny back to the border towns. Will you all promise?"

They all gave him their solemn promise not to desert Fitznoodle.

"Now that you've agreed to do that I'll talk about my legacy," said Dash. "Frank, put your hand inside my vest."

Frank did so.

"Do you find a little pocket?"

"Yes."

"Feel inside and you'll come across a flat tin tobacco box."

"I have it!" said Frank.

He drew forth the tobacco-box, and handed it to Dash.

"No, I can't open it now," said the dying hunter, handing the box back to him. "The strength has gone from my fingers. Open it."

Frank obeyed.

A small sheet of paper, carefully folded, lay in the bottom of the box.

"Have you got the paper?" asked Dash.

"Yes."

"Then you've got the map that'll guide you to the spot where ten thousand dollars in gold has been buried for two years," said Hallett. "It was in the charge of a fellow that hired me to go across the plains with him. I never knew who he was, or what he was, or to whom the money belonged, for he never told me. We had a light wagon and two good horses, and I've often thought as how he stole the money from some express company. Well, we was attacked, and this fellow was killed; so was the horses. I fought like a crazy man; there was only three reds, and I laid them all out, although I got fearfully wounded. I was too badly wounded to carry any money away with me, so I lived on the provisions in the wagon for a few days, then buried the gold, and managed to limp away, first making a rough sketch of the place where the gold was sunk. I was lucky enough to fall in with a friendly tribe of reds after a few days, and

just as I thought I was going under, I was saved. Boy, jest open that paper."

Frank carefully removed the paper from the box and unfolded it.

"I have opened it."

"Can you make out the sketch?"

"Yes."

"But the locality ain't marked, is it?" asked the dying hunter.

Frank looked closely.

"No," he said, "you have marked everything in plain style, but where is the place?"

"Mark it down," said Hallett. "Go direct to the grove called Three Islands."

"Go on."

"Then take up a course west by sou-west."

"West by sou-west," repeated Frank, marking the directions down.

"And follow it for just about two hundred miles."

"Yes."

"Then you come to a grove like Three Islands."

"Yes."

"And in that grove runs a stream," feebly continued the dying man. "There's a tall cotton-wood grows by the bank of the stream, right hand facing the sun. When the sun is about an hour high, you can see the shadow of the trunk extend over some rocks in the water. Under the furthest rock that the shadow touches lays the gold."

He paused a moment.

"Have you got it all?"

"Yes," said Frank.

"Then good-bye," said the hunter. "Take care of that greeny, and you're welcome to enjoy that gold between you. Good-bye."

And then the eyes closed, the hands relaxed, and Dash Hallett, brave, true son of the western prairies, passed quietly away to the land of shadows.

They made him a grave beneath the green sods of the prairies he had roamed for many long years, and the virgin soil was moistened by their sad, heart-born tears.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NIGHT BATTLE.

LIKE a devastating hurricane the rangers, under the lead of Bill Carter and Harry Hale, poured down upon the Brethren of the Plains.

Their hoarse cheers, sounding like the trumpet note of doom, rang and vibrated through the arches of the groves.

Their lurid torches lit up the scene with a wild, unearthly radiance.

The robbers, red and white, well knew the meaning of that terrible cheer.

It said as plainly as words could say, that their deadliest enemies were pouring down upon them, eager for their blood, determined to sweep them from the face of the earth.

They recognized the cry, and knew the men from whose throats it pealed.

These were no green emigrants, who, however brave they might be, were unused to the tactics of prairie warfare, but a band of well-armed and trained plainsmen, terrible fighters, dead-shots, perfect riders, and as fearless as the grizzlies of the mountains.

Therefore they grew appalled when the shout saluted their ears, and when Harry Hale and his brave followers poured down upon them with pistol, rifle and knife, they were too much terrified to fight.

Their ranks were broken, they were thoroughly demoralized, and their leaders were unable to collect them quickly enough to make a stand.

Captain Slasher struck down an Indian who had turned to fly.

"Halt!" he shouted, trying to stem the tide with his authoritative tones. "We are two to their one yet, and we can whip them."

"There he is!" shouted Bill Carter.

He touched Harry Hale on the arm.

"Who?"

"Captain Slasher."

"Where?" demanded the detective.

"That chap yonder flourishing a knife."

That trapper had no time to say more, for the enemy, partially reassured by Captain Slasher and his orders, began to strike back blow for blow, and Bill Carter was in receipt of delicate and personal attention from three tall sons of the western wilds.

Harry Hale shot one glance of fierce hatred at Captain Slasher, and then threw up his carbine and fired.

At the same moment the captain raised his knife to strike down an emigrant.

The bullet struck the knife, turned the blade aside, and glancing from the flashing steel sank into the body of the Osage brave.

With a cry of anger, the detective spurred his horse forward.

He vainly endeavored to reach the fighting captain.

At every point he was barred by a flying and struggling mass of men.

Try as he would he could not reach the man who had slain his brother.

The surging mass would roll between, and he was forced to strike down those nearest to him without being able to reach his hated enemy.

"Snap."

The cry came shrilly to the ears of the guide as he gathered his host around the wagons and ordered them to stand by the train.

"Here!" shouted the old man.

"It's me, Bill," came back to him. "Come and join us screamers."

"I'm thar!" yelled the old guide. "Boys, that's my brother calling, and the old man has got to go. Don't any of you stir from the train without my orders."

And then the old screamer bounded away.

The men stood firmly by the wagons, while the bullets whistled and sang a death melody over their heads.

Not more than thirty feet away from them waged a fierce conflict.

The many torches had been thrust in crevices and boughs, and now shed over the field of battle a lurid glare.

The detective was vainly striving to reach his enemy.

Captain Slasher caught sight of the brave little fellow, and seemed to return his warm hatred.

He shook his knife in the air, and Hale answered the salute of enmity with his broad bowie.

They pressed towards each other.

Still the surging crowd of men and horses kept them apart.

"Do you want me?" shouted the captain.

"I want your life!" shrieked Hale.

"Come and take it!" said Slasher, and then he leaped forward to get clear from his man.

The detective worked towards him just as rapidly, and in a few moments more two brave men met.

They glared at each other a moment in deep silence.

"I never saw you," said the captain, seeming to respect his foe's appearance. "Who are you?"

"The brother of the detective you filled with bullets," said Hale. "Draw your knife."

"I will," said the other; and his weapon flashed in his hand. "You're a game sort of a rooster, and I'm glad to meet you. Pitch in, Banty."

They rushed upon each other.

Their opposing blades met with a slash, and the sparks seemed to fairly stream from the steel.

Around them the battle raged with unabated fury.

The hoarse cries of the wild western boys answered the shouts of the Indians.

The orders of the savage chieftains were met by the commands of the two Carters, who were fighting side by side, hewing and cutting like woodmen.

Savage yells and English blasphemies, shots and blows, stabs and kicks; the neighing and plunging of the maddened horses; the mad shouts of their excited riders; all went to make up a scene that, once beheld, must live for years in memory.

Pen cannot do justice to a picture that the artist's pencil cannot truthfully portray, so the full horrors of the scene can be better guessed by the reader than conveyed by the writer.

The tide of battle was slowly but surely setting in toward the wagons, and the hardy emigrants, resting on their loaded weapons, awaited impatiently for the moment they should be commanded to fall upon the hated marauders of the plains.

They dared not fire now, for their bullets might as well strike friend as foe, so they were forced to await the approach of the foe to strike blow for blow, with clubbed gun, pistol butt, or gleaming bowie.

Amid such surroundings as these, Harry Hale and Captain Slasher closed for a deadly encounter.

They were both brave men, brave even to recklessness, and they were both young, strong, and skilled in the use of the blades they wielded.

They rather respected each other, for they mutually recognized a foe worthy of their steel.

Hale was the smaller man, and much more nimble than his antagonist.

The detective fairly showered blows upon the outlaw captain, but the latter met his thrusts with a firm guard and a true eye.

At every point Hale endeavored to thrust he was met by the long, heavy blade which was so skillfully handled by his foe.

Blow after blow was rapidly made, and as rapidly were they parried.

Then the order of the battle between these two skilled combatants changed.

Hale fell back to gain breath.

Captain Slasher immediately assumed the offensive, and the detective was forced to defend himself from skillful blows.

But he was well versed in handling the long knife, and met the captain with such coolness and steadiness that he excited the admiration of his larger opponent.

"You're worthy of my steel and no mistake," he said, looking admiringly upon the active little detective. "Now, mind your eye. I warn you that I am going to try a trick upon you."

Thus warned by his generous enemy, Hale kept his eyes open to some purpose, for he was not one of those people who affect to disregard a word of caution.

Captain Slasher stepped back for a moment, and the combatants rested.

"Ready," said the outlaw.

"Ready," said Hale.

"Then look to yourself," cried Slasher, and he leaped forward.

His hand rose and fell with rapid motion, and his flashing blade, ever falling and then rising in the torchlight's glare, seemed like a wall of steel.

He rained a perfect storm of blows upon his brave enemy.

Active and light as he was, Hale had enough to do to ward off the stabs.

For fully a minute the hurried, vicious thrusts of the captain were kept back.

None of the blows reached further than the hilt of the detective's knife.

Suddenly Captain Slasher dropped on one knee, and made a quick upward thrust for the heart of his foe.

The blow was made before Harry Hale could put himself in a position to guard.

The knife was driven upwards with all the force of Captain Slasher's powerful arm, and it went through the stout fabric like a sharp needle.

Harry Hale threw up his arms and fell prone to the stained field.

Captain Slasher leaped to his feet and found himself confronted by Snap Carter.

The battle had surged up to the wagons, and the emigrants were now battling fiercely with their foes.

"Aha!" yelled Snap.

"Oho!" yelled the captain.

"At last," said Carter, clutching his bowie.

"We'll have it out," said the captain, his blade drawn back. "Mind your eye, old man, for one of us is got to die!"

They had been waiting for this chance for some time.

They had many grudges against each other, and they were both anxious to wipe out their old scores.

They closed with a terrific crash, and their blades seemed to twist and twine like two gleaming serpents.

They fought close up, wrist to wrist, their hot breathing seeming to contend.

Suddenly Captain Slasher fell back, and clapped his hands to his side.

A flying bullet, perhaps from friend as well as from foe, had struck him, and he felt weak and faint.

He knew that he need not look for mercy in the least from Snap Carter, so he resolved to guard himself.

He shouted out a peculiar call as he staggered back.

Immediately his white followers rushed in one compact mass towards him, and in less than a minute he was protected by a cordon of steel.

Snap Carter fought his way out of the bushy throng, striking right and left in his peculiar and slashing style, and knocking over strong men like ten-pins until he stood near the wagons.

Captain Slasher called out to the red chieftans, and a retreat was ordered.

It was obeyed instantly, and in a huddled, pell-mell manner they all rushed off, making as good time through the dark groves as could be made.

The emigrants stood by the wagons, but the fire-eaters, the wild westerners under Bill Carter, were anxious to rush off in pursuit of the flying foe.

"Call 'em back, Bill," said Snap. "This may be a trick."

So Bill Carter ordered them to remain by the train, and thus the red and white fiends were enabled to get safely away.

Then the two Carters went over the field, trying to ascertain the extent of their loss.

There were many bloody corpses strewn about the grove, and wounded horses struggled with dying men.

Snap Carter gave his orders promptly.

"Light fresh torches. Hand the wounded men out from under the bodies. Shoot the wounded and dying horses. Bring water to the thirsty ones, and carry the disabled to the wagons. Tell the women to make bandages of lint and apply

healing salve. Let every driver harness his team to the wagons, and move the train one hundred yards west. Lively!"

Under his clear and sharp orders things were done without confusion, and soon the wounded were made as comfortable as was possible under the circumstances.

The screaming wounded horses received a merciful release, and soon the train was removed as Snap had directed.

The guide and his brother were slowly marching over the field, giving orders and rendering assistance to the groaning ones they met.

"I don't see the little 'un," said Bill.

"Who?" asked Snap.

"My boss."

"That little screamer that jumped off his hoss and clipped in at Slasher?"

"Yes."

"The last I see of the gritty cuss he was hackin' away at Slasher."

"I hope he didn't go under," said Bill. "He was a little screamer and no mistake. I thought a heap of that chap, Snap."

"Much obliged to you, I'm sure," said a voice from the ground. "I hope I shall always merit your good opinion. By the way, have you any whisky?"

The two old plainsmen were surprised to see Harry Hale lying near at hand, very pale looking, but evidently not seriously hurt.

The detective was resting on his elbow, and looking at them with a smile.

"Whisky!" cried Bill Carter, springing forward and grasping the hand of the detective. "Take the whole flask, you little game-cock."

Harry Hale smilingly took the flask and helped himself liberally.

"Now talk," said Snap Carter. "How did you happen to get toppled over?"

"I hardly know how," said Hale. "I tackled that Captain Slasher, and we had it hot and heavy for awhile. It was just about a good square match for him, and he can't be all bad, for he gave me plenty of chance. He even warned me, and when I was winded he let me rest, when he might have won the battle by pressing me hard. However, he told me he was going to try a trick upon me, and then he struck fast and furious. I'm good at guarding, and he couldn't touch me when we stood face to face, but he dropped down before me suddenly, and made a very rapid upward thrust at my heart. The blow knocked me over and took my wind away, and I guess it was only because my watch turned the point of the knife aside that I'm alive to tell you the story."

He got upon his feet as well and as hearty as ever he was in his life, and Bill Carter, who had taken a great fancy to the brave detective, fairly hugged him.

"If he'd killed you, I'd taken his blood by the drop," he said.

"If you could have done so," said Hale. "Let me tell you that Captain Slasher is not exactly an ordinary foe. He's a bold lad to tackle."

The train was once more corraled, and the guards posted, the two Carters declining to post only trained plainsmen for the rest of the night.

Then the tired travelers turned in to rest, and once more quiet reigned at Three Islands.

CHAPTER XXV.

"THEY SHALL BE DRIVEN INTO A TRAP."

ABOUT two miles away from Three Islands, in a moderate-sized grove, were gathered the red and white Brethren of the Plains.

Under a tall tree, made plain to the view by flaming pine-knots, lay Captain Slasher.

Over him bent the extremely revered and most mysterious medicine-man, who had been frightened by the inventor of the Steam Man of the Plains, the wonderful Mowsher-Abiner.

The captain's wound was not serious, but it had taken a little of his blood, and he felt a little weak.

Mowsher-Abiner, who really was skillful in the use of bandages and ointments, carefully attended to the wounded man, and soon made the outlaw captain feel as comfortable as was possible under the existing state of affairs.

The Indians were sitting or lying around in various attitudes.

Some were smoking, some were taking sly consolation from whisky-flasks, and others were gambling in the primitive Indian style known as "five-bones," a game they lose even their squaws at sometimes.

Many of the white robbers were sleeping on the soft turf, while others were whiling the hours away with card-playing.

There was not a white member of Captain Slasher's band who did not possess one pack of cards at least.

A pack of cards was part and parcel of the

stock in trade carried by these rough-and-ready gentlemen of the plains.

Every man had at least one pack, as we have said, and some of them took real pride in carrying separate "decks," sorted for some one of the various games they played.

Near the tree, under which the wounded captain was reclining, were Motzer-Ponum, Tolah-fresser, the grave and austere Sholum Alarkum, and at least half a dozen of the principal braves of the Osage and Sioux tribe.

Motzer-Ponum's pock-marked face was further beautified by a neat slash, which promised to leave a livid scar when it should heal.

Sholum Alarkum was spattered with blood, but was unhurt.

Tolah-fresser carried his right arm in a sling, and held a consoling pipe with his left hand, from which he puffed huge volumes of blue smoke.

"Well," said Captain Slasher, breaking in upon a moody silence which had hung over the group for some time, "we didn't succeed quite so well as we expected."

"We got whipped," candidly put in the plucky Mutseer, who bore several marks of the battle in which he had taken a very active part, "and if we'd stayed there longer I think we'd been killed."

"We were deceived," said Sholum Alarkum.

"How?" demanded Slasher.

"We expected to meet only emigrants, and we were forced to fight against those wild rangers—ugh!"

And the chieftain shuddered, as though he was much disgusted with the terrific fighting qualities of the fire-eaters.

"We would have scooped them, but for Carter and his band," said Slasher.

"And what will you do now?"

The question came from Mutseer.

"I don't really know what to do," moodily answered the captain. "I don't want to give up what I'm after, and yet there's too many old plainsmen there for me to tackle."

"That is, to meet them in a fair, square, open fight?"

"Exactly."

"Suppose you could trap them?"

"What?" cried Slasher.

"I say, suppose you could trap them—what then?"

The Indian, one of the most cruel and crafty of his race, leaned forward eagerly.

"What then?" repeated the captain. "Why, I'd gobble 'em up, I guess."

"Yes, I know," said Mutseer; "but what will you give me?"

"For catching the rats?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

"One hundred dollars."

"What'll you do with it?"

"I want to buy something I saw at the big settlement."

"If you can do anything that will place the box that contains the money into my hands, you shall have that amount of money, even if I have to pay you out of my share."

"You promise?"

"I do, and my word is just about as good as three of your oaths."

The treacherous Mutseer grinned.

"Never mind," he said, "I can stick to my word, whether I do or not; and if you promise me faithfully that you'll give me one hundred dollars, whether you get the box or not, I'll undertake to carry out my idea. They shall be driven into a trap."

"You want me to promise to give you the money, whether I get the box or not?"

"Just so," said Mutseer.

"That's cheeky," said Slasher.

"Not at all," said the Indian robber.

"And why ain't it?"

"I didn't engage to give the box in your hands, did I?"

"No."

"Didn't say that I could show you how to get the box?"

"No."

"Then there's no cheek about it," said the wily red-skin. "I don't claim to be able to obtain the box for you, for I can't do it. I'm talking about what I can do, and will do, if you come to my terms. You say that you can't meet the wild rangers in a fair open fight, so I say that I will drive them into a trap for you. I shall not stir one step towards the thing unless I have your promise of the money, no matter what comes up."

"And why should you demand a price for the service?"

"Because I shall risk my life," replied the Indian.

"In entrapping them?"

"Yes," said Mutseer. "In fact, to tell the probable truth, I don't think I shall live to claim your money. But I want the hundred dollars, and I will risk my life for it."

Motzer Ponum, who spoke extremely bad English, and very little at that, could not understand what was being said; neither could nearly all of his braves. The Sioux, from associating with the white robbers for so long a time, had all become fluent in the use of English, and those who were yet awake clustered around the two speakers, regarding Mutseer with an inquisitive stare.

"I think I know what you would do," said Tolah-fresser, speaking to Mutseer.

"What?"

"Drive them into the Wolf's Mouth," returned his red brother.

"Right," said Mutseer. "But how do you think it can be done?"

"I don't think it can," said Tolah-fresser. "They are not fools. They can see as plain as you, and they do not travel at night. If you forced them in it would have to be done in daylight, and I don't think you can do it."

"I can," confidently asserted Mutseer. "And if I can do it they cannot escape."

"That is sure," said Tolah-fresser. "Once in the Wolf's Mouth they are gone. Ten men would be enough to keep them in there until they would give up."

"Is that so?" cried Captain Slasher.

"It is true," said Mutseer.

"Then I'll give you my word that you shall have the money if you'll drive the train into that trap," said Slasher.

"Done," said Mutseer, and the compact was made. Mutseer turned to Tolah-fresser.

"I shall want you and three braves to go with me," he said. "I will leave to you the task of picking out three young warriors who are fleet as the deer and tireless as the buffalo. Now I must sleep. Keep awake, captain, and when its thirteen o'clock I want you to wake me up and call the Medicine man of the Osages."

And then, having given his orders like a leader, the cruel and crafty Mutseer rolled himself in his blanket, tumbled over and went to sleep.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MUTSEER'S DEVICE.

THE gray dawn of morning stole over the vast plains, and sent a revealing light upon the scene described below.

Mutseer, accompanied by four of his brethren, was slowly riding over the plains toward a section where an immense herd of buffaloes rested.

Over the haunches of Mutseer's horse there was slung a bison skin, having the head, ears and horns complete.

When about a mile from the spot where the leader of the vast herd lay sleeping, the master spirit drew rein.

"I will leave my horse here," he said to his companions, dismounting from the steed and removing the buffalo skin. "You can now divide and gain the rear of the herd, and begin firing just as soon as you can get in range. I shall be ready. Don't forget your orders. Keep them on the right course at any risk."

His men dashed away.

Two went to the right and two to the left, and by describing a half circle they could reunite on the other side of the herd.

Mutseer spoke to his horse, and the trained beast immediately crouched down and was well hidden in the grass.

Then the treacherous Sioux, one of the most cunning of his race, threw his bison-skin over his shoulder and tramped away in the direction of the herd.

He approached within a half mile of the foremost ones, and then proceeded to envelope himself in the skin.

The head, ears and horns set completely over him.

The disguise was quite natural-looking, and at a little distance could deceive the bisons into the belief that they looked upon one of their number.

Having arranged the disguise upon his form, the Indian went down upon all-fours and took an attitude which made it appear that he was grazing.

His followers were now approaching the vast army of beasts from the opposite side.

They had the advantage of the wind, and in a few moments were enabled to draw very close to the beasts without these latter scenting their approach.

Then they began firing rapidly from their rifles.

The startled brutes leaped to their feet, and for a moment they all stood irresolute.

The leaders threw up their heads and sniffed the air.

Bang—bang! came the rapid shots.

Two of the beasts tumbled over lifeless to the plain.

The leaders gazed behind them, and then they caught sight of their mounted foes.

The alarmed animals see no way of escape better than in the direction of the disguised Indian, who is apparently feeding on the grass.

They rush towards him, and he, taking to flight, dashes with the speed of a forest deer to where his fleet horse lay crouching amid the tall weeds.

This was the full purpose of Mutseer's neat device, for which he had secured the aid of comrades.

The great object to be attained, to successfully carry out his plan, was to get the great herd of buffaloes started in the direction he desired.

He was very fleet of foot, and managed to keep ahead of the frightened animals without great exertion.

He soon reached his horse, flung the bison skin across his haunches, mounted the animal, and dashed off at a good speed towards the south-west.

Onward came the mighty army of buffaloes, their leaders forced to maintain the start they had taken, for, if they paused but for a moment, the thousands of maddened brutes behind them would trample them to death beneath their flying feet.

After them came the four Indians, firing and yelling, and keeping the herd on the course desired by Mutseer.

The morning deepened, and the sunlight flashed over the plains.

Suddenly Mutseer gave utterance to a sound that indicated satisfaction.

Far ahead, perhaps three miles away, the treacherous Sioux could descry the long wagon train winding its slow journey over the prairies.

"Good!" he exclaimed; "they are directly on the track. They will be forced fairly into the trap."

He glanced behind him.

The buffaloes were coming on with their steady, long gallop.

He put spurs to his horse, and the fleet steed seemed to scarcely touch the ground as it bounded lightly along, stretching over the rolling prairie like a race-horse gliding over a smooth course.

He gained rapidly upon the slow-moving train.

In a very few moments he had gained a position abreast with the train, and about half a mile on their right hand.

He could see that he was noticed by the emigrants, and rising in his saddle, Mutseer pointed to the herd, which was now booming along about a mile in his rear.

At the same moment the thunder of their hoofs upon the hard plain was borne to the ears of the two Carters, who rode at the head of the train.

Then Mutseer heard their orders ring out on the air, and immediately the animals that were attached to the wagon were put under their top speed, and the long train went dashing over the plains.

Then the Indian dashed away at full speed, lashing his flying steed at a terrible rate, and aiming for a point several degrees off the course followed by the train.

In less than three minutes he had reached the spot where the train was bound to pass, and then he continued on, after crossing the course, until about a quarter of a mile had been spanned.

Here he drew up, and placed his fingers to his mouth.

He blew a shrill signal-whistle, and was answered from the west.

Here we must pause to describe the place near which Mutseer sat motionless upon his panting steed.

The vast plain was ribbed with two long and high walls of rock, rising up from the ground like two fences.

These two long ribs extended about half a mile away to the west, and then they rose up and united, growing together, and forming an impassable wall hundreds of feet high, and fully an eighth of a mile in thickness.

It will be easily understood that this was a perfect trap.

Once in the long entrance to the long, blind alley of rock, there was no mode of leaving the inclosure except by the same opening that allowed entrance.

This entrance was perhaps a hundred or more yards in width, and could be guarded by a few expert riflemen with such effect that those who had entered the blind path could not come forth without being shot down.

Even the most desperate combined charge that could be made could be checked and thrown into disorder by a volley from sharpshooters,

who could easily be concealed in the huge clefts of rock.

This was the horrible trap into which the cruel Mutseer desired to drive the emigrant train.

To accomplish this feat it was necessary to stop them from going either to the right or to the left of the blind canyon, and this difficulty was got over by the band of men who now issued from the trap, led on by Captain Slasher and Sholum Alarkum.

They filed away to the right and left, and took up their positions some distance from the defile, just out of gunshot on either hand, thus holding themselves ready in equally divided numbers to prevent the emigrants from passing the trap.

Onward came the swiftly-moving train, and onward came the surging mass of scared animals at its rear.

Straight for the trap dashed the foremost wagon of the train.

Snap Carter's eyes blazed as he noticed the band filing out of the blind pass, and an anxious expression crossed his face when they took up their position.

"Good God!" he exclaimed.

Harry Hale, who was leaping along at the side of the guide, looked at him in surprise.

"What's the matter?"

"Carter pointed to the pass, and then to the men stationed on either hand of the rocky entrance.

"That's a blind pass," he said. "I know it as well as I know myself, for I come very near caving in that about a year ago; them two spurs o' rock jine and rise up, and it's a regular trap. If we're forced in that hole we shall never git out ag'in without help from the outside."

"Let me charge them with my band of screamers," cried Hale.

"It would be a waste o' life," sternly said the guide. "While you was tackling them and fighting for nothing, the buffaloes would force us in just the same, and you'd lose men for nothing."

"Then we're trapped," said Hale.

"So it seems."

"I don't like to be snared without striking a blow."

"Neither do I," said Snap. "I ain't that kind of a man, but the lives of these men and women are in my hands, and I mustn't throw 'em away. We must go in that trap, and trust to luck to get out again. This is a neat plan, nicely laid, and very well carried out—and we're in for it."

They dashed on in moody silence, every man holding one hand upon his knife or pistol, ready to repel attack if the divided horde in front of them should pour down upon them.

"This is horrible," said Hale, looking back over his shoulders at the buffaloes. "How are we to escape them even now?"

"By the pass," said Snap.

"But won't they follow?"

"If they do it will be by climbing over the dead bodies of their brother beasts," replied the guide.

"As soon as the train is fairly in the pass, you and your men must guard the mouth and shoot down anything, man or beast, that comes within range."

The four Indians in the rear of the madly plunging buffaloes kept firing and yelling at the frightened beasts, and caused them to continue on an undeviating line for the spurs of rock.

Behind their horses sat the red and white men under the command of Slasher and the grave Sholum Alarkum, motionless as statues, and as grim in appearance.

The pass was reached.

Snap Carter swerved aside and allowed the forewagons to drive rapidly into the defile.

All wagons all dashed in at a rapid rate, and immediately after the last one of the long train had passed in, the rough-and-ready rangers took up their position with cocked rifles, ready to defend the rocky entrance at any cost.

The buffaloes rushed up at a terrific pace, and a volley crashed out in deadly tones.

The leaders dropped dead before the steady aim of the western sharpshooters, and then the vast herd divided and coursed away to the right and left, causing the Brethren of the Plains to take to their heels.

Just as this took place, there came a familiar sound to the ears of the strong, brave men who guarded the pass.

The shrill whistle of the Terror of the West rang out, and the Steam Man dashed up to them over the plains.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FIFTY MILES AN HOUR.

FRANK sat on the seat, guiding the huge man with practiced hands, while behind stood Charley Gorse and Barney, gazing attentively upon the unusual scene.

The Steam Man dashed straight up to the spot where the wild marksmen were grouped before

coming to a halt, and then the power was shut off, and the long iron limbs came to a stand-still.

Frank leaped to the ground, and as he did so his hand was grasped by the stout old guide, who greeted him in the most hearty manner.

"Glad to see you," cried Snap Carter, shaking our hero's hand with vigor, and turning to his brother, he added:

"Bill, here's a thunderin' little screamer!"

"Glad to know you," said Bill Carter, and was about to grip Frank's hand in his usual bear-hug style, when Augustus Fitznoodle, who was standing near, exclaimed:

"Please, Mr. Carter, don't be quite so glad to see 'im h'as you were to see me, h'or the boy won't be h'able to get the kinks h'out h'of 'is 'and for a week."

"Ho—ho! ha—ha!" laughed the big westerner, who remembered his first handshake with the cockney. "I shan't hurt the youngster. Here, my lad, kiver that."

He held out his huge paw.

"I'm afraid I can't do it," said Frank, looking smilingly at the bearish paw extended to him, and then at his own slender, white hand; "but I'll put my hand in yours, and say that I am pleased to meet you."

"That's the ticket!" cried Bill. Lord, you've got jest such a handle as my gal."

Just as they were shaking hands the robbers, who had made a swift detour on either side of the herd of brutes, came circling back towards the pass, whirling around in large circles.

"I don't see 'em all," said Snap Carter, his gaze fixed upon the horsemen who were circling around over the plain, ever keeping just outside of rifle shot. "I kin only see about as many as we are, and there was jest twice as many afore."

He was lacking just then in his customary keenness, or he might have suspected the ruse that was being played upon him and his followers by the daring and cunning Captain Slasher.

He was correct in his estimate that not more than half of the robber band were riding in view.

While the trained horsemen were wheeling and pirouetting at a safe distance from the pass, their brethren were crawling very rapidly along the sides of the double spur of rocks, seeking to gain positions which would secure them from danger, while it afforded them opportunity to fire upon the emigrants and drive them further up the terrible trap.

Of course the prancing company of horsemen in front were sent to their positions merely to engage the attention of the emigrants, while the crawling bandits gained the posts they desired.

The ruse was a neat one, and succeeded.

In a few moments a dozen shots rang out from the ends of the double spur, and two of the emigrants fell dead.

Others were wounded, and fell back in the arms of their surprised friends, gasping for breath.

Snap Carter recognized too late the danger he might have avoided by a little prudent forethought, and he fairly ground his teeth with rage when he found how completely he had been duped by his enemy's shallow trick.

However, he met the crisis with his usual cool authority, and showed that he was the man to command.

"Dash up the grass, every man except the wild rangers," he shouted. "Rush lively, and carry the wounded men with you. Now, you scarecrows try to gain a cover and shoot anything you see quiver."

The emigrants dashed up the pass as fast as possible, bearing their wounded with them.

The Steam Man afforded the best bulwark for the rangers, and they crouched behind it in numbers, while others sought crevices in the rocky wall.

But they were fired upon from above, and then from both sides, and many of the brave fellows were wounded without being able to fire back upon the hidden foes.

Mutseer had indeed driven them into a most terrible trap.

It was useless to remain. They must retreat sooner or later. It was throwing lives away to stay, and reluctantly Snap Carter gave the order to run up the pass.

Frank Reade knew that he would run a great risk in mounting his box, but the boy had grown accustomed to danger, and did not shrink from it.

Moreover, he was determined not to leave the Steam Man at the mercy of his foes, so he made a reckless leap, landed on the seat, and with a quick movement pulled on the reins.

The man gave a bound.

A dozen rifles cracked.

The bullets whistled and sang around the brave boy, and his feathered cap was torn from his head by a flying ball.

The Steam Man tore up the blind pass, and in a moment Frank Reade was safe from his enemies.

The steam was almost entirely shut off, and the

monster proceeded up the hard road at a leisurely walk.

The spot was soon reached where all of the emigrants and plainsmen were clustered around a dying man.

"Here's a nice pickle," said Harry Hale, his pitying eyes fixed upon the features of the man. "This poor chap is a goner. There are more lying cold down the valley, and several wounded, and for all this we are powerless to retaliate."

"What can we do?" said Snap Carter. "We are in the trap, and we can't leave it without help from the outside. Put five hundred men in here; give me ten good marksman, and I'll engage to hold 'em in check as long as the rations last."

"Then you must have help from the outside in order to escape?" said Frank.

"Just so."

"And where'll you get it from?"

"Cussed if I know," said Snap. "A man could never get out on horseback. He might get away by crawlin', and then he would have to be smart."

"And if he got away?" cried Frank, his eyes beginning to blaze. "What then?"

"What then?" said Snap Carter. "Why, he could go to Fort Tremont and bring a troop of cavalry here as fast as horses could run. That's what."

"What's the distance?"

"One hundred and fifty miles."

"Then, in four hours I shall be at Fort Tremont," cried Frank Reade. "Half an hour to get ready for the long and fast run; half an hour's rest on the road to cool my hot box, and the distance to be covered in the three remaining hours."

"What, fifty miles in an hour?" cried Mr. George Augustus Fitznoodle.

"Yes, sirree," said the inventor of the Steam Man, walking up to his machine and very rapidly emptying the ashes from the knee-pan of the monster. "Fifty miles an hour, and I can do it or bust."

But you can bet your loose change that he looked well to everything before he made the venture.

His fire was raked out and a clear one of solid coal built. Water was supplied to the reservoir in plenty. Everything was screwed down to stand jolting, and every crevice was carefully ciled.

"But, you'll be fired h'upon by those 'eathenish men h'out there," said George Augustus to the daring boy.

"Let 'em fire," said Frank. "I shall be under a shirt of steel. Charley will go with me and crouch in the body of the wagon. I shall fly past them at such speed that they'll need to have good eyes to see me."

He completed his arrangements, and was informed as to the exact course necessary to be followed to reach the fort.

"And then they can't get here in less nor day after to-morrow," said Snap. "Well, we can hold out till then, and then the thing will wind up in the biggest kind of a row."

"Och, and won't that be jist as illigant as can be?" cried Barney Shea.

"They'll be here before that," said Frank. "I shall get there at noon, and if they start out at once they can reach here by nightfall to-morrow."

Our hero and Charley Gorse partook of a substantial meal, and then the Steam Man was slowly turned around with his face to the entrance of the pass.

Then Charley sank down in the box. Frank donned his steel shirt, and a tremendous head of steam was put on.

The man sprang forward like a meteor, and went fairly flying down the pass, the pebbles rising in a cloud from his course.

Out of the trap, with the speed of the winter winds, sprang the Terror of the West, his huge feet spurning the ground at a fearful rate, while the boy-driver sat grimly upon the seat, the breeze fairly humming through his ears as he whisked along at that terrific speed.

A few shots rang out, but Frank was going too fast for even sharpshooters.

On sped the man, his long iron limbs shooting in and out like rockets.

On with a speed that the prairie denizens had never witnessed before, mile after mile gliding swiftly by under the monster's tireless strides.

Ah! it was a grand ride, this swift, terrific pace that endangered life, and the boys enjoyed it keenly. Then a short rest was taken, to allow the heated apparatus to cool, and in less than half an hour the pace was again taken up.

In just three hours and a half from the time of starting, the Steam Man dashed up to the gates of Fort Tremont, and the commandant came forward with words of welcome.

In a few moments Frank told his story, and the officer immediately issued his orders.

In a half hour the Steam Man was guiding a troop of cavalry to the rescue.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE night of the morrow had come.

All day long the men confined in that terrible trap had looked longingly towards the east, anxiously awaiting the sound of the bugle, or the whistle of the Steam Man.

Now night had come, and just as the shades were deepening, there rang out the thrilling notes of the cavalry charge, followed by the more piercing voice of the Terror of the West.

The rescuers were at hand.

Crash!

A lurid flame leaped up to the sky as the rifles pealed forth their death notes, and a bright red globe flashed back a thousand lights from the burnished metal as the troopers charged down upon the Brethren of the Plains.

Snap Carter's voice rang out like a bugle, his tones heard distinctly above the clash and din, higher than the roar of the battle.

"Dash down the pass!" shrieked the fighting old guide. "The cavalry's here!"

Scarcely had his clarion voice thundered forth the command ere the men rushed like maddened brutes down the rocky roadway, straining every nerve to reach the battle-ground before the fight was over.

The Steam Man was standing close to the entrance, his huge, brilliant eyes glowing out with fearful gaze upon the scene.

A huge pan filled with chemical powder was burning upon the body of the wagon, and cast a wild, terrible glare over the stained field.

The outlaws were fighting like infuriated devils, and as they were many in numbers, and desperate in courage, they made a most bloody resistance.

The wild rangers dashed out of the pass like antelopes, and on foot rushed down upon the outlaws, seeking out the leaders, whether red or white, and engaging them in mortal strife.

Snap Carter made a dash for Mutseer, the head and front of all this trouble, and with ease seized him in his arms, and dashed him against the wall of rock, killing him instantly.

Thus was he rewarded for bringing them into the horrible trap.

Frank covered Sholum Alarkum, and sent him to the grass with a bullet in his brain.

Harry Hale looked eagerly around for Captain Slasher.

The brave outlaw leader was fighting like a fiend, and urging on his followers by example and command.

The detective threw his rifle to his shoulder and fired.

Captain Slasher threw back his hands, his eyes closed, and he fell from his horse to the plains, dead.

Tolahfresser was killed at the same moment by a cavalryman.

Motzer-Ponum was shot through the heart by Charley Gorse, and almost at the same moment the lieutenant of the robbers was laid low by the shillelah of our friend Barney Shay.

These few deaths decided the battle.

Without leaders, the outlaws were unable to cope with the combined forces, and in a few moments they turned tail with one accord, and darted away.

A wild cheer went up to the sky, and the western men caught Frank Reade in their arms, and hugged him like a child.

"Hunky boy!" they cried. "You're a regular screamer. Three cheers for the youngster and the Steam Man of the Plains!"

And the rocky pass rang loudly with the thundering voices.

At this moment the rather stoutly-built Mr. Fitznoodle came up to the spot, saying that he had tried to reach the battle-field in time to take part in the action, but "really, h'I h'am not built for running, you know."

"Your friend is dead," said Frank, who had not had time to think of poor Hallett when meeting the Englishman in the pass the day previously. "Dash is gone."

"Poor 'Allett!" cried Fitznoodle, throwing up his hands in surprise. "Positively?"

"I helped bury him," said Frank. "He left you to our care, Charley, Barney and myself, and we promised to take you back to the civilized country before we left you. Then he died easy."

"Poor fellow—poor fellow!" muttered George Augustus. "Well, h'I must say h'I 'ave become so 'eartily disgusted with this 'orrid 'eathenish land where the natives have h'advocates of h'indiscriminate connection, h'and where the female natives believe h'in a perpetual leap year, that h'I shall be pleased to go back to the more civilized posts with you h'again. H'its h'a 'orrid section h'of country just h'around 'ere, h'and h'I shall not regret leaving h'it h'in the least."

There was a good deal of laughter over the Englishman's odd observations, and then the leader of the cavalry stepped forward and offered to escort the cockney to the nearest settlement, if he so desired.

George Augustus said yes.

Charley turned to Frank.

"This takes it off of your hands."

"Just so," said Frank. "Now we are free to go where we please. In the morning we'll go to Three Islands, and start for the stream which flows over our gold."

* * * * *

"Go to Three Islands. Travel west by southwest for two hundred miles, until you come to a grove like Three Islands, through which runs a stream. On the right hand, facing the sun, a tall cottonwood grows on the bank of the stream. When the sun is one hour high, the shadow of the trunk falls over some rocks in the stream. Under the furthest rock touched by the shadow the gold lies buried."

This had been the sum and substance of Dash Hallett's parting bequest to Frank and his comrades, and now the three stood beside the tall cottonwood, while the rising sun began to cast its shadows over the slowly-moving stream.

Soon the long shadows of the cottonwood stole out over the stream towards a cluster of rocks, and the three gold-seekers watched carefully for the long bar to run out to the fullest length.

At length it fell on the largest rock in the group, and then Frank looked at his watch, and declared the sun to be exactly one hour high.

Instantly they waded into the stream, and ran out through its shallow course towards the rock where the slanting bar of shade now rested.

The rock was long and broad, but very flat and thin, and when the Irishman put his strong hands under it, the slab came up with ease.

Before them lay three half-submerged boxes,

made of some hard wood that stood the action of the water without rotting.

"Give us a lift," cried Barney.

In a moment the two boys had caught hold of one of the boxes with him, and carried it to the bank where the Steam Man stood.

The other boxes were soon hauled up on shore, and then the fastenings of one was carefully removed by Frank.

"Hurrah!" cried Charley Gorse.

"Will I ever go home?" yelled Barney Shea.

"You'll have enough to carry you there and keep you like a gentleman when you get there, at all events," said Frank Reade; for in front of them lay an open canvas bag of shining gold money. Not dust, but coined dollars ready for use.

They were as wild as most mortals would be under the same circumstances, and could hardly think of doing anything all the morning but look at their treasure.

"And the fun of it is that it is worth more than ten thousand," said Frank.

"How so?" said Charley.

"The premium on yellow boys will bring the amount up to fifteen thousand," said the driver of the Steam Man. "When I left New York gold stood at one hundred and fifty, so if we can bring our pile safely to some broker's office, we shall each pocket five thousand apiece."

"Hooroo!" said Barney. "Faith, I'll take meself back to the swate town of Clonakilty, so I will. I'll build meself a nate little cabin, and I'll be afther marryin' one o' the best and puttiest colleens in the whole county of cork, for I'll be a land-owner; and thin it'll be good morning, Squire Shea. Hooroo!"

And getting out his fiddle, he played the "Devil's Dream," and jigged to the music to let off his extra feelings.

"And what will you do?" asked Charley Gorse of his cousin.

"Oh, I'll go home and spend half of the pile in making a steam steed," said Frank.

"What?" said Charley.

"I mean it," said Frank. "I'm going to try and invent a horse that will go by steam, and then hurrah for the west again!"

"Bully boy!" said Charley. "Make a team of 'em, while you are about it—but what will you do with the Steam Man?"

"I don't know."

"Sell it to me," said Charley. "I will give you my share of the gold for him, for I want the old fellow. With so much money you can carry out your ideas fully, and come out to me next year with a steam team."

That decided the young genius, and from that moment the Terror of the West belonged to Charley Gorse.

They succeeded in running in safety to the village where Charley lived, and then the Irishman and Frank took leave of their cousin and friend, and with the three boxes of gold they took passage on board a boat that conveyed them to a city where they connected with a railroad, and they were soon whistling towards New York, where they arrived in safety.

George Augustus Fitznoodle and Barney Shea happened to meet, and they took passage for the old country together, and at last accounts, they were both doing well.

Charley Gorse succeeded in escaping all the skins with the Terror of the West; and as for Frank Reade—well, he don't die with the conclusion of THE STEAM MAN OF THE PLAINS.

[THE END.]

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